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A COURSE of SERMONS

Preach'd for the Lecture founded by the
Honourable ROBERT BOYLE Esq;
at the Church of *St. Mary le Bow*, in the
Years 1713, and 1714.

WHEREIN

The True Notion of the Exercise of PRIVATE
JUDGMENT, or FREE-THINKING,
in Matters of Religion, is Stated; The Ob-
jections against it, Answered; And the Modern
way of *Free-Thinking*, as treated of in a late
Discourse on that Subject, is taken into Con-
sideration.

By the late Reverend
BENJAMIN IBBOT, D.D.

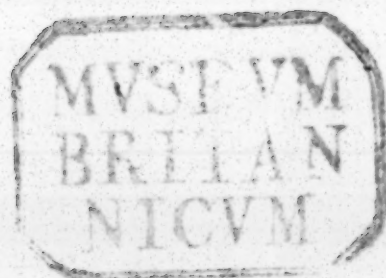
Chaplain in Ordinary to His MAJESTY, Pre-
bendary of *Westminster*, Treasurer of *Wells*,
Rector of *St. Paul's Shadwel*, and Preacher-
Assistant at *St. James's Westminster*.

Appointed to be Publish'd by the AUTHOR, in his Last Will.

To which is Added,

A List of the Learned Persons who have preached the said
Lecture from its beginning in the Year 1692, to the pre-
sent Year 1726, with an Account of their Subjects.

LONDON, Printed for JOHN WYAT at
the *Rose* in *St. Paul's Church-yard*. 1727.



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1 Theff. v. 21. *Prove all things : hold fast
that which is good.*

L O N D O N,
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Church-Yard, 1727.

7

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S E R M O N S

I N O U T R E

L O R D S

W I T H

L I N E S

B Y M R J O H N

W I L K I N S O N

L O R D S

W I T H



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SERMON



SERMON I.

The True NOTION of *Free-Thinking.*



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast
that which is good.*



HO' these words seem to be independent, and make an entire Sense of themselves ; yet they have a connexion with what went before, and will be more clearly understood, if we look back to the 19th Verse, where we are commanded, *not to quench the spirit,* i.e. the Gifts and Operations of the Spirit,
B whether

SERMON.

I.
~

SERM. whether ordinary or extraordinary ; such
 I. as were peculiar to the primitive Christians, or such as were design'd to continue in the Church, and to be enjoy'd in common by all Christians to the end of the World. These, as they were never design'd to supersede all Actions and Endeavours of our own, may be lost by Mens own Fault and Neglect ; they may be stifled by Sloth and Security, *and choak'd with the Cares, and Riches, and inordinate Pleasures of this life*, Luke viii. 14.

BUT they may be cherish'd and improv'd by continual Labour and Study, by fervent Prayer and a Holy Life. And this is what the Apostle exhorts us to, when he bids us *not to quench the spirit*.

AMONGST these spiritual Gifts the Apostle gives the preference to Prophecy: *Desire spiritual Gifts*, (says he) *but rather that ye may prophesy*, 1 Cor. xiv. 1. This is what he had a very great Opinion of, as an useful ministration in the Church ; and therefore he adds in the next Verse, I mean the Verse before my Text, *Despise not prophesying* : Which word has various significations ; but it seems here, and in other places of St. Paul's Epistles, to mean the

of Free-Thinking.

3

the Interpretation and Application of Scrip- SERM.
ture, and is the same thing with what is I.
now call'd *Preaching*.

SOME expounded Scripture by an extraordinary Gift, and immediate Revelation, which private Members of the Church had in those times. Others did it, not by such an extraordinary Gift, or not by that only, but by Office also. *Eph. iv. 11.*

AND all this was done amongst *Christians* only. And it was done in their publick Assemblies of Divine Worship, for the *building themselves up in their holy Faith*, and the mutual Instruction and Improvement of each other. Which I thought proper just to remark, in vindication of the present *preaching* of the Ministers of the Gospel, which is agreeable to the ancient *Prophefying* us'd in the primitive Church, and does therefore deserve a better Name, and more honourable Appellations than of late hath been bestow'd upon it. Some have been pleas'd to stile it (a) *Harangue*, and (b) *Pedantick Forms of Pulpit*

(a) *Letter to the Deists*, pag. 37. And *Preface to the Lady's Religion*.

(b) *Letter to the Deists*, pag. 133.

SERM. *Speeches*, and (a) *Orations on certain Subjects*. (b) Another says, with his usual Modesty and good Manners, *that haranguing upon a Text among Christians, is falsely call'd preaching the Gospel*. 'Tis not indeed preaching the Gospel to *Heathens* and *Infidels*, but 'tis the same preaching which was in use in the Primitive Church. However since he will allow no preaching of the Gospel but in his own Sense, I believe, in this Age and Nation, the Gospel may truly be said to be Preach'd ev'n in that Sense.

THE Apostle bids them not to *despise* these *Prophecys*, but to attend diligently upon them, as being of great use and benefit to the Church. He cautions them against rejecting and setting at nought such an useful Ministration, as some did, out of a proud Conceit of their own Knowledge, or a Contempt of the Meanness of him that perform'd it, or a downright Defiance of Religion: and would have them value and esteem this Office, and pay all due Respect and Regard to it.

(a) *Sensus Communis*, pag. 17.

(b) *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, p. 43.

of Free-Thinking.

5

BUT because ev'n they who Prophecy'd SERM.
I.
or Preach'd by an extraordinary Gift, were to *prophecy according to the proportion of Faith*, (a) Rom. 12. 6. i. e. according to the measure of the Gift of Interpretation which was given them; and were not to pretend to interpret Scripture any further than they were enabled by Revelation and an extraordinary Illumination to understand and expound it: Because they were not to go beyond that which was given them, and they really had, as some amongst them were apt to do, who, being puff'd up with their Gifts, were desirous of carrying them further than in reality they extended; And because they who prophecy'd by Office only, and without these extraordinary Assistances, might mistake the true Meaning of Scripture, and deliver that for a divine Truth, which was but their own Opinion, and perhaps an Error: Therefore the Apostle adds, in the words of the Text, *Prove all things: hold fast that which is good.* The Apostle would not have them despise and reject all Prophecying; nor, on the contrary,

(a) See Mr. Locke's excellent Note upon this Place.

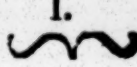
SERM. give themselves up blindly to their Teachers, and receive every thing for Truth which they should deliver : But he prescribes a middle Way between these two Extreame; and that is, to make use of their own Reason and Judgment, to *prove all things*, to bring every thing to the test and trial, and to compare it with the Scripture, the Rule and Standard of Divine Truth : to reject whatever appear'd contrary to that Rule, and to hold fast whatever was agreeable to it, or recommended by it.

THIS is the (a) connexion and meaning of these words, which contain,

I. AN express Command, to try or examine all things which concern Religion ; to search into the Grounds and Foundations of our Faith ; to weigh the Arguments and Proofs upon which any Point of Doctrine or Practice is establish'd ; to de-

(a) Cohærent igitur inter se isti quoque tres versiculi in hunc sensum : Charismata spiritualia nolite prohibere vel rejicere : Imprimis autem prophetiæ donum in pretio habete ; ne verofucus vobis fiat, & Commenta Hominum ut Dei Verbum oborudentur, omnia probate : quod bonum fuerit, retinete, ne cuius spiritui credite, sed probate spiritus an ex Deo sint. Nam multi Pseudo-Propheta venerunt in mundum. 1 Joh. 4. 1.

Calixtus in locum.

bate, argue, and reason upon the Matter, SERM.
or, in a more modern Phrase, to *think* I.
freely about it. 

2. THE End for which this Trial and Examination is to be made; the View which we ought to have before us in *thinking freely* and reasoning fairly upon religious Matters, and that is, to *hold fast that which is good*, to establish our selves in the profession of the true Faith.

To *prove all things*, is what many shew themselves very ready and forward to do. We live in a very free and inquisitive Age, which is far from following any Man or number of Men blindly, or taking any thing from them upon trust; but is for proving and bringing every thing to the test, looking back and tracing things up to their first origin; which will let nothing pass without a severe scrutiny and strict examination, and is resolv'd to guard against all *Priest-craft* and Deceit, and not be cheated by *any crafty and designing Men*.

AND thus far all is right: This is very commendable; 'tis to act the part of reasonable Creatures, and to *shew our selves*

SERM. Men. But it may be justly question'd,
 I. and it is much to be suspected, whether all
 this be done by those who would now
 distinguish themselves by the Title of
Free-Thinkers, with honest and upright
 Intentions, and for that End which the
 Apostle here recommends to us, and for the
 sake of which he commands us to *prove*
all things, and that is, in order to *bold*
fast that which is good : to find out the
 true Religion ; and when we have done
 that, to embrace it, and live agreeably
 to it.

FOR some of those who make the greatest
 pretences to *Free-Thinking*, and the loudest
 noise about strict Reasoning ; who set up
 for Leaders of Others, and would be
 thought the only Patrons of the Peoples
 Right, and the Asserters of their just Li-
 berty, do not seem, by the course of their
 Proceedings, and the management of their
 Arguments, to have this End in view :
 They seem to be fond of *free-thinking*,
 because they fancy it will justify *free living* ;
 and make use of the liberty of private
 Judgment, as a Cloak and Cover for Scep-
 ticism and Infidelity. They are for pro-
 ving all things, or rather, disproving all
 things,

things, if they could, in order to get loose SERM.
I.
from every thing that is good. They are
for trying and examining all Points in Re-
ligion; not in order to establish the great
Truths of Religion, but to undermine and
shake the Foundations of All. They are
for calling every thing into question; not
for the sake of clearing up things that are
obscure, but to obscure those that are al-
ready clear, and, if possible, to render all
things doubtful and uncertain.

THESE seem to be the real Views and
Designs of the *Free-Thinkers* of our Age,
which they endeavour to conceal under
that specious Name.

I hope therefore it will not be look'd
upon as an unuseful Undertaking, or fo-
reign to the Design of these LECTURES,
to rescue Liberty of Private Judgment, or
Freedom of Thought, from such Abuses,
and to direct it to those proper Ends and
Uses for which it is allow'd and enjoin'd
us, and for which it ought always to be
us'd.

IN prosecuting this Subject, I shall ob-
serve the following Method.

I. To

SERM.

I.


- I. To enquire what the Apostle here means by *proving all things* : To state the true Notion of that Private Judgment, or Freedom of Thought, which every Man ought to exercise in Religious Matters, and to shew wherein it consists.
- II. To consider what that *Free-Thinking* is which is falsely so call'd, and which some have lately taken up, and to shew how much it differs from *that* in the Text.
- III. To prove that the exercise of Private Judgment or *Free-Thinking* properly so call'd, is not only every Man's just Right, and what he cannot be depriv'd of by any Authority whatever ; but that 'tis every Man's Duty, and what we are all indispensably oblig'd to.
- IV. To shew what Cautions are necessary to be observ'd in the Use and Exercise of it.

V. WHEREAS

V. WHEREAS our modern Pretenders to S E R M.

Free-Thinking seem to hope by that Means to undermine all Religion, I shall endeavour to shew that True Religion is not an Enemy to True *Free-Thinking*; and that the more freely and impartially we think of the Christian Religion in particular, the more reasonable and credible it will appear to be.

I.
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VI. THE Mischiefs and Dangers which Men expose themselves to, by indulging that Humour which they falsely call *Free-Thinking*.

Ist then, I am to enquire what the Apostle here means *by proving all things*: to state the true Notion of that private Judgment, or Freedom of Thought, which every Man ought to exercise in Religious Matters, and to shew wherein it consists.

THE Apostle's Precept is universal. It is directed to private Persons, and concerns every Man whatever. And the Trial or Examination which he enjoins every Man to make, is to be extended to every thing

SERM. I. thing in Religion; to all Points whatever, both of Doctrine and Practice. There are no Restraints to be put upon it, nor any Limits set to it. The Sacredness and Importance of any Subject cannot exempt it from this Trial. On the contrary, the more Important any Matter is, the more Reason there is why we should Think freely, and satisfy our selves fully about it. Matters of Religion ought not, of all others, to be taken upon trust. In a Business of such high Importance, we cannot use too much Caution and Deliberation. There is nothing wherein we are more concern'd to see with our own Eyes, and exercise our own Reason and Understanding; because 'tis here that our greatest Interest lies at stake: And if through a wilful neglect of using our own Judgment we fall into a wrong Way, it may lead us to our Eternal Ruine.

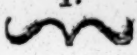
Now when the Apostle bids us *prove all things*, i. e. try and examine every thing which is propos'd to us as necessary to be believ'd or practis'd; he plainly supposes that there is some Rule in being, whereby we may judge of what is thus propos'd to us, and measure its Truth or Falshood.

THIS



*of* Free-Thinking.

13

THIS Rule can be no other, than SERM.  
either that Reason which every Man is I.  
endow'd with, whereby he is distinguish'd   
from, and excels other Creatures; or that  
Revelation which God has vouchsaf'd him,  
whereby he is enabl'd to know more than  
the bare Light of Reason could have discover'd. And ev'n where there is a Divine  
Revelation, 'tis by the Use of Reason that  
we are to judge of the Proofs of this  
Revelation, and of the true Sense and  
Meaning of it.

THAT we are Thinking Creatures, is  
a self-evident Truth; a waking Man finds  
himself under a necessity of having some  
Thoughts, some Idea's or other constantly  
in his Mind. And thus far he is not at  
liberty to think, or not to think: But  
he is at liberty, for the most part, to  
chuse what his Thoughts shall dwell  
upon, what shall be the Subject of his  
Reasonings and Enquiries; and to pursue  
this or that Reasoning or Enquiry  
as long, or as little as he pleases, with  
more or less attention. Every Man finds  
in himself this liberty of Thinking.

AND this Liberty we are enjoin'd to  
use in Religious Matters; we are to have  
them

**SERM.** them often in our Minds, and make them  
 I. the frequent Subject of our Thoughts, and  
 to argue and reason with our selves about  
 them. Barely to Think upon any Subject,  
 or to have it before our Minds, as any  
 Object lies before our Eyes, is nothing,  
 and does not determine us one way or  
 other; it neither makes us believe or dis-  
 believe any thing about it. In order to  
 this, it is necessary that we examine into  
 it, that we compare it with other things,  
 and exercise our Reason and Judgment about  
 it, to discover its Truth or Falshood.

WITHOUT this 'tis impossible for us to  
 come to the knowledge of any thing but  
 Matters of Sense and Intuition, which  
 take in but a very few things in compa-  
 rison. In all other things, whatever Know-  
 ledge we have, must come by using our  
 own Reason and Judgment. Matters of  
 Sense are out of the present Question:  
 And Matters of Intuition, where the  
 Agreement or Disagreement between two  
 Idea's is so apparent, that 'tis immedi-  
 ately visible, without the intervention of  
 others, in Religion are but few. So that  
 there is a great deal of room for the ex-  
 ercise of our rational Faculties in Reli-  
 gious

gious Matters, where the Agreement or Disagreement of our Idea's cannot be found out without the help of other intermediate Idea's, and disposing them in a proper Order, in which the Faculty of Reasoning consists.

S E R M.  
I.

IN this Proceeding there are several Rules necessary to be observ'd, without which we can never reason justly, nor indeed *think freely* upon any Subject ; some of which it will be proper to mention in this Place.

I. THE First and fundamental thing which we should possess our selves of, is a sincere love of Truth for its own sake : This is a necessary preparation for a successful search and enquiry after it. He that is not a Lover of Truth for Truth's sake, will not be in earnest in his pursuit after it. He will not take the Wise Man's Advice, *Prov. 23. 23. Buy the Truth, and sell it not ; i. e. spare no Cost to purchase Truth, and part not with it for any Gain.* On the contrary, he will not give himself any great Trouble to get it, or any great Concern when he misses or loses it.

THIS love of Truth, is what almost every one pretends to, and yet there are but



SERM. but very few who truly have it. This ap-  
 I. pears more-especially in Mens Disputes  
 about Religious Matters, where they will  
 not be satisfy'd with such Proofs as the  
 nature of the Thing is capable of, and make  
 those Objections which they would be a-  
 fhamed of in any other Case.

WE are not indeed to entertain any  
 Proposition with greater Assurance than  
 the Proof it is built upon will warrant.  
 The Evidence which we have for the Truth  
 of any thing, is always to be the Measure  
 of our Assent: And whoever goes beyond  
 this Measure, 'tis plain does not receive  
 Truth in the love of it: He loves not  
 Truth for Truth's sake, but for some other  
 Bye-end; and does not so much believe  
 any thing to be true because it is so, as  
 because he is willing and desirous to have  
 it so.

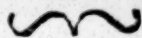
BUT as our Assent to any thing pro-  
 pos'd to us for true, is not to rise higher  
 than the Proofs upon which it is built; so  
 neither is it to fall lower than these Proofs.  
 And therefore whenever any thing has all  
 the Proofs of its being true, which it could  
 possibly have were it actually true; we  
 ought to give it our full Assent. And if

*of Free-Thinking.*

17

S E R M.

I.



in such a Case, we with-hold our Assent, 'tis evident that we have not a general love for Truth ; but have some false Byass upon us, are prejudic'd against some Truths, and will not receive those things for true, which we are unwilling should be so. Hence it is that Difficulties and Objections are often started out of nothing ; and where there are real ones, they are magnify'd beyond what they deserve, and represented to be of greater weight and force than they truly are : And the Answers which are made to them, tho' never so just and full, will always appear with disadvantage, and be thought weak and unsatisfactory, or trifling and evasive. This will be the Case where the love of Truth does not prevail : Our Enquiries after it will be either cool and indifferent, or partial and defective ; and all our Examinations will be made, either with little Care, or much Prejudice. To avoid which Inconveniencies, we should learn to love Truth for it self.

WE should consider that 'tis what we were made to discover and entertain ; that 'tis what our rational Faculties ought to be employ'd about ; what tends to the Perfection and Advancement of our Na-  
C tures,

SERM. tures, and to make us more and more like  
 I. God, who is Truth and Light itself, and  
 in whom there is no Error, or Darknes. Our Souls are nearly ally'd and a-kin to Truth; and 'till we have given ourselves a distaste to it, by some inordinate Passion or corrupt Affection, 'tis the most grateful and pleasant thing to the Mind; and whatever Truth appears to us, our Souls are apt to go out to meet it, and to greet it as their first and most intimate acquaintance.

WE should make it our business to renew this Love and Friendship for Truth, and to establish a firm League with it, so as never to vary or depart from it upon any consideration whatever.

2. IF we be thus in love with Truth, we shall never be afraid of it, or dread any of the Consequences that may follow from it. *Perfect Love casteth out Fear.* He that is in love with all Truth, will be afraid of none, but will be ready to entertain any Truth, whensoever, and by whatsoever means it appears. And this is another Rule to be observ'd in this Matter, not to let our Fears hinder us in our enquiries after Truth, or put a stop  
 to

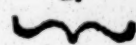


## of Free-Thinking.

19

S E R M.

I.



to our searches. For we have no occasion to be afraid of any thing which is true; nothing which is mischievous or hurtful can possibly follow from so great a good as Truth is. If we have been in an Error, let that Error be what it will, 'tis highly fit that we should be undeceiv'd, and this will always turn to our Advantage.

No Man can possibly find his Interest by being kept in the dark; one mistake generally leads us into another, and so on *in infinitum*, 'till we are perfectly lost. Whereas nothing can follow from Truth but Truth; and the more of this we have, the more Light we have, and the more able we shall be to discern and pursue our true Interest.

LET us therefore never decline this Tryal for fear of suffering any thing from it; but let us stand it out, and dread none of the Consequences of any Truth, or forbear to push the Matter as far as it will go, lest we should light upon any thing which we do not care for.

INDEED, if Things would comply with our Opinions, and be just what we conceive them to be, something might be said in our excuse; but since Things are stubborn

SERM. born and inflexible, and will not yield to,  
 I. or comply with our Opinions, 'tis fit that  
 our Opinions should yield to and comply  
 with them, and hold a strict Agreement  
 and Conformity to them. *For great is  
 Truth, and mighty above all things, and  
 she will prevail at the last.* Tho' she be  
 not always welcome, yet 'tis always wise  
 to hearken unto her, because she is faith-  
 ful and impartial in her Counsels, and in  
 great Kindness and Charity will let us see  
 our Condition, and give us warning of any  
 Danger we are in, that we may take time-  
 ly care to prevent it. To this purpose  
 St. *Austin* discourses in his *Confessions*;  
 (a) *Truth*, (says he) *thou art every where  
 near to those who consult thee; and thou  
 givest answer to every one, how different so-  
 ever their enquiries are. Thou indeed an-  
 swerest distinctly, but every one does not hear  
 distinctly. Men consult thee in all Places,  
 but they do not always hear what they de-*

---

(a) *Ubique Veritas præsides omnibus consulentibus te, si-  
 mulque respondes omnibus etiam diversa consulentibus. Li-  
 quidè tu respondes, sed non liquidè omnes audiunt. Omnes  
 undè volunt consulunt, sed non semper quod volunt audiunt.  
 Optimus minister tuus est, qui non magis intuetur hoc à te  
 audire quod ipse voluerit, sed potius hoc velle quod à te au-  
 dierit. Lib. 10. cap. 26.*

*fire. He is thy best Disciple, who is not so much concern'd to hear from thee what he desires, as to comply with, and be obedient to what he hears.*

S E R M.

I.

WE often build upon a false Foundation, or at least upon one which we know not to be right. We receive many Things for true without examining them, and we act upon a supposition of their being true; and then we dare not examine, for fear we should find our mistake: But this is a preposterous way of proceeding, and beginning at the wrong end. We should receive nothing for Truth but what we have first examined, and found to be so. Or if we have been so imprudent or so unfortunate as to take things for true, without examination, this should not make us afraid or unwilling to search into them afterwards: because things will be just what they are; and we shall find them so at last, however we may think of them at present: And tho' we may receive infinite Mischief from Error and Falshood, we can at no time be hurt by the Truth, and should therefore never be afraid to see and know it.

3. THIS being the Case of Truth, whenever we take any thing into examination,



SERM. nation, and *think freely* about it, in order  
 I. to find out whether it be true or not, we  
 must do it with the utmost Sincerity and  
 Impartiality; we must consider fairly the  
 Evidences for and against it, and weigh  
 the Proofs one against another; we must  
 revolve the thing in our Minds, turn it  
 often in our Thoughts, and see what can  
 be said on either side of the Question;  
 we must divest our selves of all manner of  
 Prejudice and Prepossession, lay aside eve-  
 ry thing which may be a Weight and Byass  
 upon our Minds, all receiv'd Hypotheses  
 and Opinions, and all predominant Pas-  
 sions and Inclinations; we should not so  
 much as wish or desire that one side should  
 be true more than the other, but only that  
 we might find on which side the Truth  
 lies, and have no other Ends in view but  
 that.

And in our Enquiries after Truth, and  
 the trial and examination which we make  
 of Things propos'd to us as such, we should  
 proceed upon the Principles of Reason, ar-  
 gue calmly and closely, and debate the Mat-  
 ter with the greatest freedom and fairness,  
 neither wilfully concealing nor over-look-  
 ing the force of any Arguments, but giving  
 all

all the Proofs all the Weight they have, or are capable of, and dealing in like manner with all the Objections which are or can be made.

S E R M.  
I.

WE should never go out of our Way to please a Party, or gratify any corrupt Passion or Affection. We should neither be prejudic'd against Mens Persons, nor *have them in admiration*. We should consider what is said, and not who says it; and our Replies should be made in the Spirit of Meekness, and not of Bitterness; in hard Arguments, but in soft Words. We should never make use of Railing instead of Reasoning; but when our Arguments are at an end, our Dispute should be so too, and we should willingly submit. Victory is not the thing we should contend for, but Truth; and when we have once gain'd that, from whatever Quarter it comes, we have gain'd our End, and our Enquiries upon that Point are to cease.

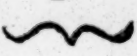
4. IN trying and examining religious Matters, in order to find out what is true, we are to use all proper Helps and Assistances which God has afforded us.

IF we enjoy the Benefit of Revelation, and the Question be concerning the Sense

SERM. of any particular Place of Scripture, whether such a Truth or Proposition be contain'd in that Place ; or more generally, whether the main Body and Collection of those Truths, which are propos'd to us for divine Truths, be contain'd in Scripture: In this Case, we are not indeed, to think our selves oblig'd to interpret Scripture according to what some Men call *the Analogy of Faith*; by which they seem really to mean no more than their own particular Scheme or System of Christian Doctrines. For this would be not only to set up that for a Rule of Interpretation of Scripture, which had not its Being 'till long after the Scripture ; but, which is more absurd, to interpret the infallible Word of God by the fallible Opinions of Men.

NEITHER are we to imagine, on the other side, that our own Natural Reason and Sagacity (let them be never so great) without more particular Helps, will sufficiently qualify us for the finding out the true Sense of the Scriptures. No, it is not by meer Reason, any more than by modern Opinions, that we can get a true Understanding of the Scriptures or any ancient Writings: But in order to this we must  
make



make use of other Helps and Assistances, SERM.  
to which the true Rules of Criticism will I.  
direct us; such as the Languages wherein   
the Scriptures were wrote; the Idioms  
thereof, and of that particular Writer  
whose Meaning we are to inquire into;  
the Manners and Customs of the People to  
whom the Speech or Writing is directed;  
the particular Opinions and Perswasions  
which prevail'd at that time; the then  
State and Posture of Affairs, and the Wri-  
tings of the same or the next following  
Ages. These and such like Helps are not  
only proper but necessary towards a right  
Understanding of Scripture; and these  
every diligent Examiner and *Free-Thinker*  
ought to make use of in his Interpretation  
of Scripture. And whatever he may call  
himself, he thinks like a Fool, who thinks  
to criticise upon the Scriptures, or upon  
the Interpretations that have been made of  
them, without a competent measure of  
these Helps. Where Men are destitute of  
any divine Revelation, and have no other  
Guide but their own Reason, they must  
stick to that, and make the best Use of it  
which they are able. They must free them-  
selves from all Prejudice and Partiality, all  
corrupt

SERM. corrupt Passions and Affections, and every  
 I. thing which may obscure the Light of Reason, or hinder it from exerting its Force. They must exercise and improve their Reason, by Consideration and Experience, by contemplating God and themselves, and the relation and dependance they stand in to Him, and the several Duties thence arising: by observing the Works of Creation and Providence, and forming from them such Notions of God, and his Nature and Attributes, as appear most just and agreeable to Truth. In a Word, whatever appears to them, upon a free use and exercise of their Rational Faculties to be true, that they are bound to believe; and whatever appears, upon all respects, fittest to be done, that they are bound to practise.

5. THE last thing I shall mention as necessary in all our Examinations and Enquiries after Truth, is, a firm resolution to embrace it, whenever we find it, to yield ourselves up to it, and be govern'd by it.

THIS is the End for which the Apostle enjoins us to *prove all things*, that we may *hold fast that which is good*. And  
 this

this is the End which every sincere Lover S E R M.  
of Truth will propose to himself in his I.  
Enquiries after it ; to submit to it, when  
he finds it, and frame his Life and Con-  
versation accordingly.

IF we do not enquire after Truth with  
this design, our enquiries are not only vain  
and insignificant, but will be very partial  
and defective, and not carry'd on with  
that Industry and Sincerity which is abso-  
lutely necessary towards finding out the  
Truth.

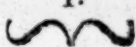
THERE are some Truths purely spe-  
culative, which begin and end in the Head,  
without ever sinking into the Heart : which  
serve only for the amusement and enter-  
tainment of the Mind, and not the govern-  
ment of our Lives and Actions. But the  
Truths which I am now speaking of, are  
of another Nature : They are religious  
Truths, and such as affect our Hearts,  
and will, more or less, influence our prac-  
tice. And therefore if we be not resolv'd  
to be govern'd by them, we shall never  
be sincerely willing and desirous to know  
them. Any religious Truth will make  
us uneasy, as long as we *hold it in un-  
righteousness* : And this will make us wil-  
ling



SERM. ling to shun the knowledge of it, or dis-  
 I. pose us to part with it after we have  
 got it, and to endeavour to establish our-  
 selves in the contrary Opinion.

THIS, at least, will be the consequence  
 of our unwillingness to yield to and obey  
 the Truth, that we shall require stricter  
 Proofs of the Truth, than are either ne-  
 cessary or possible to be had, and insist  
 upon such a Certainty as is inconsistent  
 with our present State and Condition;  
 which naturally leads to *Pyrrhonism* and  
*Scepticism*, and so on to downright *Atheism*  
 and *Infidelity*,

THE Apostle supposes, that amongst  
 all those things which we are to try,  
 some will be found to abide the Tryal,  
 and to hold good. And I think 'tis evident  
 and what Men are generally agreed in,  
 that there is a difference in Things; that  
 there is Truth and Falshood, Right and  
 Wrong, Good and Evil. Now that, which  
 after our best enquiries, appears to us to  
 be true, to be right, and good, we are  
 to esteem so, and to embrace as such.  
 There is nothing so evident, which some  
 Men will not deny; nothing so plain, but  
 Objections of some kind or other may be  
 made



made against it. And therefore that definition of *Certainty* which an ancient Writer (*Melchior Camus*) gives us, seems to be very just and proper: *Certa apud Homines ea sunt, quæ negari sine perviciâ & stultitiâ non possunt*; Those things are to be look'd upon by Men as Certain, which cannot be deny'd without apparent Obstinacy and Folly. Whenever our Enquiries have brought us in such Evidence for the Truth of any thing, as cannot be resisted or oppos'd without shameful Folly and unreasonable Obstinacy; we should willingly receive it, and submit to it, and give up ourselves to be govern'd by it.

AND this may suffice for the *First* thing propos'd, which was, To enquire what is meant by *proving all things*: To state the True Notion of that private Judgment or Freedom of Thought which every Man is to exercise in religious Matters, and to shew wherein it consists.

IF all our searches and enquiries into religious Matters, be under such management and direction, as has been describ'd in the foregoing Discourse, they will always have a good Effect. True Religion can never suffer by such *Free-Thinking* as this: As  
it

SERM. it is most agreeable to Reason, so it will  
I. bear the strictest Tryal which can be made  
of it upon the Principles of right Reason,  
upon the foot of true Argument. But  
this Method is not observ'd by all who  
pretend to *Free-Thinking*; which brings  
me in the

Ild. Place, To consider what that *Free-Thinking* is, which is Falsely so call'd, and  
which some have lately taken up; and to  
shew how much it differs from that which  
is recommended to us in the Text, and  
which alone deserves that Name.

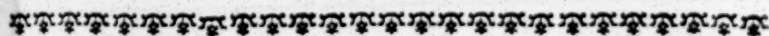






## SERMON II.

Of *Free-Thinking*, Falsely so called,  
or an Examination into the mo-  
dern *Free-Thinking*; and by the  
way, of the Proofs of Revelation  
in general, and of the Christian  
Revelation in particular.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast  
that which is good.*



THESE words contain an ex-  
press Precept for a free Tryal  
and Examination of all things  
propos'd to us under the Name  
and Notion of Religion, in or-  
der to find out the Truth and embrace  
it. And it is not only every Man's just  
Right,

SERM.  
II.

SERM.

II.

Right, but his indispensable Duty to make this Tryal and Examination; to make use of his own Reason, and judge for himself in a matter of so great Importance as that of Religion.

THIS is what there are great pretences made to at present, under the Name of *Free-Thinking*; which, if taken in a right sense, has nothing in it but what is commendable, and tends to promote the Interest of true Religion; but in the sense wherein it seems of late to have been taken, and the manner wherein it has been exercis'd, it is of a very pernicious Consequence, destructive not only of Reveal'd, but of all true Religion, and undermining the Foundations of all Certainty, and opening a door to *Libertinism* and *Scepticism*, *Atheism* and *Infidelity*. I thought it therefore a proper, as well as an useful Undertaking, to set this Matter in a just Light, to rescue this Liberty of private Judgment, or *Free-Thinking*, from those Abuses which have been put upon it, and to direct it to those Ends and Uses for which it is allow'd and enjoyn'd us.

IN pursuance of this Design, the First thing I propos'd to do, was to enquire

what

what the Apostle here means by *proving all things*, to state the True Notion of that private Judgment or Freedom of Thought which every Man ought to exercise in Religious Matters, and to shew wherein it consists. And this I did at large in my last Discourse; wherein I took particular notice of some of those things which are necessary to be observ'd in this matter, and without which, we can never reason justly, or *think freely* upon any Subject: such, for instance, as a sincere love of Truth for its own sake; not being afraid of the Truth, or any of the Consequences of it; pursuing our Enquiries with the utmost Sincerity and Impartiality; using all proper Helps and Assistances which God has afforded us; and resolving to embrace the Truth whenever we find it, to yield our selves up to it, and be govern'd by it. I proceed now to the next Point propos'd, which was,

Illy, To consider, what that *Free-Thinking* is, which is *Falsely so call'd*, and which some have lately taken up; and to shew how much it differs from that which is recommended to us in the Text, and which alone deserves that Name.

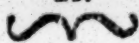
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NOW the *Free-Thinking* of the present Age, if we may judge of it from the Writings of those who make the greatest Pretensions to it, differs widely from *Free-Thinking* properly so call'd, *i. e.* from fair Examination and just Reasoning. There seems to be the same difference between the Writings of True *Free-Thinkers*, and those which now come from Men, who profess themselves to be such, as there is between Liberty and Licentiousness, or between being govern'd by wise and wholesome Laws, and living without Law, and being left to Anarchy and Confusion.

As a Man is never the more a *Free Agent*, (in a true Sense of the word *Freedom*) because he can break loose from the conduct of Reason, and all the restraints of Examination and Judgment; so no Man should be esteem'd ever the more a *Free-Thinker*, because in thinking or communicating his own Thoughts to others, he is under no Government or Direction, nor observes any Rules, nor keeps to any Method or Order.

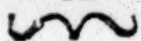
As 'tis no Restraint or Diminution of our natural Freedom, but the very Improvement and Benefit of it; not any A-  
bridge-

bridgment but the true End and Use of SERM.  
II.  
our Liberty, to determine our Choice by  
wise Motives and Considerations; so 'tis  
no Restraint or Diminution of our Free-  
dom of Thinking, to think justly, and  
to carry on our Thoughts with due Order  
and Method; to conform our Apprehen-  
sions to the Nature of Things, and not  
to deny or affirm any thing indifferently,  
and at pleasure.

BUT the present Freedom which some  
have us'd in their Thoughts and Writings,  
is not a Freedom, but a Licentiousness of  
Thought; indulging a roving Fancy, and  
a rambling Imagination, and just such a  
Liberty of Thinking and Expressing their  
Thoughts, as that is of Acting, which  
Fools and Mad-men engross to themselves,  
and whereby they think themselves the  
only Free-men in the World. 'Tis a very  
wrong and mistaken *Freedom of Thought*  
which they indulge, and which by no  
means deserves that Name. 'Tis so far  
from being any thing which is uni-  
form and consistent with itself, or sub-  
ject to any proper Rules and Measures,  
(as all true Reasoning is) that 'tis diffi-  
cult to give any exact Description of it.

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It puts on so many Appearances, and shews itself under such a variety of Shapes and Dresses, that 'tis next to impossible to settle a clear and distinct Notion of it. 'Tis rather *foolish talking and jesting*, than just and *free thinking*. 'Tis babling and *prating against Religion with malicious Words*, more than making any sober and impartial Enquiries about it. 'Tis made up of many things which have no relation to *Free-Thinking* and just Reasoning, and several others which are directly contrary to it. 'Tis an unaccountable medley and mixture of Humour and Fancy, Mirth and Merriment, Malice and Mistakes, many of which, 'tis to be fear'd, are wilful. It consists, for the most part, in Boldness and Rashness, Arrogance and Presumption. It is full of manifest Prejudices and Prepossessions, and delights mightily in Opposition and Contradiction, in Paradox and Perverseness.

THIS seems to be the *Free-Thinking* so much boasted of, and magnify'd at present; and this Charge I shall make good, in my following Discourses, by several undeniable Instances.

BUT



BUT because the great and general Defect of the present *Free-Thinkers*, and which discovers it self in all their Proceedings, is a Neglect of the proper Rules and Measures of true *Free-Thinking*, and fair Examination, and those Things which are necessary to be observ'd by every one who sets up for a *Free-Thinker* and Examiner; and because, in my last Discourse, I laid down some of these Rules; I shall now apply them to the present *Free-Thinking*, in order to discover and lay open the Falseness of it.

THE *Ist* of these Rules was this, That every one who seriously sets upon the search of Truth, ought first to prepare his Mind with a Love of Truth for its own sake.

WHETHER we thus love Truth, we may certainly know by our entertaining or not entertaining any Proposition with greater or less Assurance than the Proofs it is built upon will warrant.

THE strength and evidence of the Proofs of any Proposition is always to be the measure and standard of our Assent to it. And therefore if our present *Free-Thinkers* do either refuse to give that Cre-

SERM. dit to some Things which the Principles  
 II. and Proofs they are built upon would warrant, or give it to others which are not supported by sufficient degrees of Evidence, 'tis manifest that they have not a love for Truth.

AND this will lead me to examine some of their chief and principal Reasonings and Arguments.

THIS indeed, will be a difficult Task, because, tho' they have made use of several Premises, they do not directly draw any particular Conclusions from them; and yet, at the same time, they give us broad Hints of what they would be at; and seem loth to leave us altogether in the Dark as to their real Design and Intention.

NOW, suppose there was a Question started concerning the Reality and Existence of a Divine Revelation in general; Whether God did ever afford Men any other Light than that of Nature; any other Means of coming to the Knowledge of the Truth, than their own bare Reason and Understanding? Let us think freely upon this Question, and try which way we can determine it.

AND

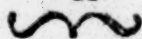
AND here, I presume, it will not be affirm'd by any *Free-Thinker*, that God, by giving us the Light of Reason, has ty'd up his own Hands from affording us, when he thinks fit, the Light of Revelation, especially in those Things, wherein, by the Use of Reason, we could never arrive at any Certainty. None, who believes a God, will deny that 'tis possible for him to communicate the Knowledge of his Will to his Creatures by other Ways than those which we are ordinarily acquainted withal. God may do this, even in those Things which are discoverable by Reason. There is no Inconsistency or Contradiction in this, and therefore it is possible. But it is not only possible, but also 'tis highly probable (as I may have occasion to shew hereafter) that God should do this in Things where our Reason would fail us, and never bring us to any clear and certain Knowledge.

To proceed: If God may thus reveal his Will to any one in a different way from that of Reason, and make known to him more than could possibly be discover'd by Reason; He may certainly empower that Person whom he thinks fit to



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favour with this extraordinary kind and degree of Knowledge, to communicate it to others, and enable him to give sufficient Testimonies of his coming from *Him*, and to do such wonderful Things as shall be esteem'd an adequate Proof of his divine Mission, and convince all unprejudic'd Thinkers that he delivers what he receiv'd from God.

THIS being the Case, and a divine Revelation being no ways impossible, 'tis by no means just Reasoning, however it may be call'd *Free-Thinking*, to infer, or so much as to insinuate, that because there have been some *artificial designing Men*, or *crack-brain'd Enthusiasts*, who have made false Pretences to a divine Revelation, that therefore there is no such thing at all: That because several have either wickedly feign'd, or weakly fancy'd to themselves a Commission from God to make new Discoveries to Men; that therefore none were ever sent upon this Errand. Just as if we should argue that there can be no true Standard or good Coin, because so much counterfeit Money passes abroad; or because many who pretend to Honesty are Knaves, and that there is not an honest Man

in

in the World, nor any such thing as Ho- S E R M.  
nesty; because there are so many Falsities, II.  
therefore there is nothing true; because  
there is so much wrong Reasoning and ab-  
surd Arguing, therefore no such thing as  
true Reasoning and good Argument. There  
is scarce any thing but what may be con-  
futed and disprov'd at this rate. But if any  
Argument can be drawn from hence, it  
seems to lie on the other side of the Que-  
stion; the many Counterfeits and false  
Pretences being rather a Proof of the Re-  
ality and Existence of the things counter-  
feited.

How then shall we know whether  
any one who pretends to a Divine Re-  
velation, really has One? I answer, by  
some External Sign or Token to evidence  
the Truth of this Pretension. (a) Who-  
ever has a Revelation from God, must  
have something else besides the Internal  
Light of Assurance in his own Mind, to  
satisfy even himself that it is from God.  
And therefore whenever God vouchsafes a  
Divine Revelation to any, he cannot leave  
them to their own persuasions alone that

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(a) *Vide* Locke's Essay, Book 4. cap. 19. sect. 15:

S E R M. this is a Revelation from Him ; because  
 II. this would be no satisfaction either to themselves or others, and so the Revelation would be to no purpose ; to prevent which, 'tis necessary that they should have some outward Signs to convince them that these Revelations come from God ; and when they are to convince others, that they should have a Power given them to justify the Truth of their Commission from Heaven, and by visible Signs to assert the Divine Authority of the Message they are sent with. All this seems highly agreeable to Reason. Accordingly, we find by the Accounts, which the Scriptures have given us of this Matter, that God observ'd this Method towards those who were immediately sent with Revelations from him to other People ; and the Scriptures, I hope, will be allow'd for true Histories of Matters of Fact, especially of such Facts as are not in themselves Incredible, and imply no Impossibility or Contradiction, which is all the Use I shall make of them at present.

T H U S we read of *Moses*, in *Exod. iii.* that he saw the Bush burn without being consum'd, and heard a voice out of it.  
 This



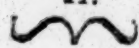
This was something more than barely feeling an Impulse upon himself to go to *Pharaoh* that he might bring his Brethren out of *Egypt*, which Impulse he could not have known to have been from God, without this outward Sign. And yet, he could not look upon this sufficient to authorize him to go upon that Message; for tho' this might satisfy himself, it could be no Satisfaction to others; and therefore, God was pleas'd by another Miracle, of his Rod turn'd into a Serpent, to assure him of a Power to testify his Mission by the same Miracle repeated before them, whom he was sent to; *Exod. 4.* This Power which God gave to *Moses*, was greater than that of the Magicians; and restrain'd that Power by which they acted, which was an undeniable Proof of his Divine Mission; and yet *Pharaoh* would not believe or receive his Message. 'Tis needless to add any other Instances to this: This being enough to shew what is a sufficient Proof and Evidence of a Divine Mission; and therefore they who withhold their assent in such a Case, are not Lovers of Truth for Truth's sake, and have no mind that the Message should be True.

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FROM the Consideration of the Possibility and Proofs of a Divine Revelation in general, let us proceed to the Examination of some one Divine Revelation in particular; and let us propose, for Instance, to Examine whether the Christian Religion is founded on Divine Revelation; or, in other words, whether that be a Divine Revelation on which it is founded, or only a meer Dream and Delusion, Enthusiasm and Fancy in those who first believ'd it. How shall we come to be certainly resolv'd in this important Point? And here we are caution'd against the (a) *Policy of certain half-witted Politicians, who draw People in with a Pretence of fair play, by telling them they shall and ought to see freely; whereas if they do not see with the Eyes of their Guides, but desire to see with their own, they shall be us'd as ill as their Guides can possibly use them. To avoid which, we are directed to renounce all Guides whatever, and to think freely with ourselves about the Matter.*

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(a) *Discourse of Free-Thinking, pag. 24.*

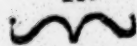
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BUT if, by *Free-Thinking*, be meant, as it sometimes seems to be by those who make the greatest Pretences to it, bare Reason strictly and properly so call'd, abstract Thoughts, and metaphysical Speculations, without any foreign Help and Assistance, (which Error I shall take further notice of in the progress of this Discourse;) I say, 'tis impossible for us this way to come to any Certainty in the present Case: For Divine Revelation in general, and that, in particular, upon which Christianity is founded, does ultimately resolve it self into plain Matter of Fact: The truth of which, at this Distance, can be learn'd only from the History of it. Whence it is manifest, that the Evidence we can have of the Truth of the Christian Revelation, can be no other than a moral Evidence arising from ancient Testimonies, and authentick History of plain Matters of Fact. And for any one to pretend to determine whether the Christian Revelation be true, by *Free-Thinking*, excepting only such Matters as are chargeable with Impossibility and Contradiction, which the Christian Revelation (as I shall shew) is perfectly free from; and to be satisfy'd of this by  
his



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his own Thoughts barely, without going out of himself, and looking abroad, would be just as absurd as to pretend to find out whether there ever was such a Person as *Julius Cæsar*, and whether the Things reported of him be true, by bare dint of Thought and mental Reflection, without having recourse to any ancient Histories, excepting against such things as appear impossible, and seem to imply a Contradiction. For these are all Matters of Fact suppos'd to be done many Ages ago; and a Man may think, and turn them over in his Mind as long and as often as he pleases, without ever coming one jot the nearer to a knowledge of their Truth or Falshood. This cannot possibly be determin'd any other way than by consulting History, and searching the Records of Antiquity, to see whether any mention be made of such Persons and Things in those Times, and what Credit the Reports have in other Writings of the same, or the next succeeding Ages.

THE Case is the same with Respect to the Christian Revelation, the Truth of which depends upon the Truth of several Matters of Fact; which Facts can be learn'd

learn'd only from History, that being the proper way of conveying the knowledge of them to us. S E R M.  
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So that if I should propose to inform my self, whether the Christian Revelation be true, I must enquire into the Truth of such Facts as these, *viz.* whether there was such a Person as *Jesus Christ* who appear'd in the World about that time wherein he is said to have come; whether his Birth was after such an Extraordinary Manner as is related; whether he had such and such Persons for his constant Followers and Attendants; whether he liv'd and convers'd with People in such Places, wrought those Miracles which are reported of Him, and preach'd those Doctrines which are ascrib'd to Him; whether he was publicly put to Death after such a Manner, and miraculously rose again, and shew'd himself to his Disciples: *i. e.* in one word, whether the History of the Gospel be true; for if that be true, the Christian Revelation is so too. Now 'tis impossible to determine this in our own Thoughts only; we must take in the Witness and Testimony of others, who liv'd at, or near those Times, and examine all

SER M. all the Evidences and Monuments of Antiquity relating to these Facts.

II.

AND whoever takes this Pains, will find that the History of the Gospel stands upon a firmer bottom, than any other History in the World; and whatever can weaken its Credit, and render it suspicious, will at the same time destroy the Credit of all History whatever, and it will be impossible for us to be certain of any Matters of Fact but what falls under the cognizance of our Senses, or were reported to us by Persons of Honesty and Ability, who were themselves Eye-witnesses of them.

AND therefore whoever rejects the History of the Gospel, and yet at the same time gives Credit to other Histories, whose Authority stands upon the same foot with that of the Gospel, discovers gross Partiality and Insincerity, and is no Lover of Truth for Truth's sake. In all this, there is no occasion for carrying the Credit of the Gospel any higher than that of any other Authentick History.

BUT if the Facts recorded in the Gospel be True, then Christianity is founded on Divine Revelation; then our Saviour

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had Authority from God to declare his Will to us; then he had Power to commission others to teach in his Name, and transmit his Doctrines down to Posterity; then he did assist them to do this with Certainty, *i. e.* without any fundamental Error or Mistake: Then we may justly suppose these Writings to be freer from all such Effects of Human Weakness and Infirmary as would any ways hinder the main Design and Intention of them, than any other whatever; and that they contain nothing, especially in Points of any Moment, but what we may with Certainty depend upon for true. And tho' we may dispute the Meaning and Signification of the Terms, and the Proposition which they contain, yet we cannot doubt the Truth of it in general, because it comes from One who cannot err, and will not deceive.

THE *Free-Thinkers* pretend to own the Divine Authority of these Books in some respects, and yet imagine they can shew that they are useless, and incapable of answering the End for which they were written, namely, the conveying down to us the great Truths of Religion.

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FOR we are told, that (a) *the Priests throughout the World differ about Scriptures, and the Authority of Scriptures.* And under this Head, to make the Difference appear the wider, all Religions whatever, and Priests of all Religions, all Systems of Religion, and all Scriptures whatever, every Writing receiv'd by any People, or in any Age of the World for *Scripture*, are all brought in and put upon a level with one another, without any manner of difference or distinction. The *Bramins* and the *Persees*, the *Bonzes* and the *Talapoins*, the *Dervizes* and the *Rabbies*, and, in a word, *Heathens* and *Infidels*, *Jews* and *Christians*, are all thrown together in a promiscuous Heap, all having their different Scriptures, and all of them, as they imagine, of equal Authority, *i. e.* of none at all.

As to the Heathen Priests, and the different Scriptures which they receive, it is nothing at all to the purpose ; unless it can be prov'd that they have as much Authority on their side as the Christian Priests, and as just Pretences to a Divine Revela-

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(a) *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, pag. 52.

*Falsely so called.*

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S E R M.  
II.

tion. This indeed is basely insinuated, by their being brought in with the Christian Priests, and put upon a level with them. But all this is weak and thin Slander, which every one may see through; 'tis meer impotent Malice, without the least shadow or appearance of any Argument to support it. And therefore I shall pass on to what I think my self oblig'd to vindicate, and that is, the Divine Authority of those Books which Christians receive, and believe to be the Word of God.

A N D here I shall confine my self to the Books of the *New Testament*, not only because 'tis against these that the chief Objections are rais'd, but because if the Authority of the New Testament be once well establish'd, and prov'd to be Divine, the Divine Authority of the Old Testament cannot be question'd; because the New Testament often quotes the Old as such, and frequently bestows this Character upon it. So that if the New Testament be of Divine Authority, and contains the Oracles of God, the Old Testament cannot be a meer Human Composition.

I N asserting the Authority of these Books, I shall *first* consider the Matter contain'd



SERM. contain'd in these Books ; and, *secondly*,  
 II. the Books themselves.

THE Authority of these Books, is that peculiar Right or Privilege which they have to be receiv'd and regarded by us as True ; to oblige us to yield our assent to whatever is there said or foretold ; to govern our Actions according to what is there commanded or prohibited, and to believe whatever is there promis'd or threatned.

THE immediate foundation or formal reason of this Authority of the Scriptures is this, that they have GOD for their Author, who has an undoubted Right to oblige Men to yield their Assent to whatever He says, their Obedience to what He commands, and their Belief to what He has promis'd or threatned ; who justly deserves to be credited in whatever He says or foretels, upon account of his Infallibility and Veracity ; to be obey'd in whatever He forbids or commands, upon account of his unquestionable Authority and irresistible Power ; to be believ'd in what he has promis'd or threatned, upon account of his immutable Fidelity, and inflexible Justice.

THE remote Foundation of this Authority, is the Matter contain'd in these Books, which proves them to be from GOD, and not of meer Human Invention and Composition. And this is what I shall *first* endeavour to shew in my following Discourse.

NOW the Contents of these Books may be rank'd under Three Heads.

1. THERE are some things, which Men, by their own Parts or Industry, could never have invented or thought on.

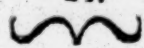
2. THERE are other things, which, tho' not beyond the reach of Human Parts or Industry, yet cannot be suppos'd to proceed from Men : because no reason can be assign'd why Men should invent such things ; but, on the contrary, there is good reason why they should not invent them.

3. THERE are other things, which, tho' Men might and would invent ; yet they could not believe them, or perswade themselves that they would ever come to pass.

UNDER the *First* Head, I reckon all the Miracles which were wrought by our

S E R M.

II.



Saviour and his Apostles, and which are recorded in the four *Gospels*, and the *Acts* of the Apostles; and not only so, but whatever Prophecies and Predictions we meet with in the New Testament, which were punctually accomplish'd. All these are so well known, that there is no occasion to enumerate them particularly.

UNDER the *Second* Head, I rank the Precepts of Christianity, as they are laid down in the New Testament, where we may consider the Things themselves, or the Actions which are enjoin'd us. The Persons to whom these Injunctions are given, and the manner wherein they are to be observ'd and perform'd.

THE Things themselves or Actions which are enjoin'd us, are, many of them, according to Man's Judgment, ridiculous and absurd; as believing in Christ crucify'd, one who was put to Death as a Malefactor by his own Country-men. Or they are contrary to the common Affections and Dispositions of Human Nature, as Mortification and Self-denial, loving our Enemies,  *blessing those who curse us, and praying for them who despitefully use and persecute us:* being



being ready to part with every thing that is dear to us, even Life it self, for the sake of Christ, or for the good of our Brethren. S E R M.  
II.

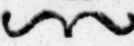
THE Persons who are enjoin'd the practice of these things, are all Men whatever, without any difference or distinction. The Prince and the Peasant, the greatest as well as the meanest Men upon the Earth.

THE manner wherein these Duties are to be perform'd, is *with all our heart, and all our soul, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned*, 1 Tim. i. 5.

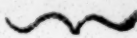
UNDER the *Third* Head, I place the Rewards and Punishments propos'd to us in these Books, especially those which are future and invisible, and not to take place 'till another Life.

THESE are the chief things contain'd in these Books, and these are frequently and fully set forth, inculcated and press'd upon us with great seriousness and earnestness, in a peculiar simplicity and plainness of Words and Expressions.

Now such things as these must have God for their Author, and could proceed

SERM. from none but Him. For what Man could  
 II.  perfwade himself, or would attempt to perfwade others, that a Virgin should conceive, and bring forth a Son. That this Person should himself perform fuch wonderful Things, and enable others to do the like; that inveterate Diftempers, and fuch as were incurable by any Art, fhould be heal'd by a Word; that Storms and Tempefts fhould in like manner be laid; that the Dead fhould be rais'd to Life, and the like; that feveral furprifing Events fhould be foretold long before they happen'd, and when there was not the leaft probability of their fo falling out? Had there not been undeniable Instances of this kind, who could have feign'd that thefe and fuch like Things were ever done? Such Things as thefe would furpafs all Belief, if the Relation of them was not fupported by undeniable Experiments and Examples.

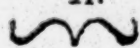
AGAIN; What Man would, if he could, frame a Religion which contains fuch Precepts as are fit to deter Men from profefing and embracing it? which enjoins Things ungrateful to Flefh and Blood, difficult to be perform'd, and contrary to

to the common Sense of Mankind, and S E R M.  
which, whether we perform them sin- II.  
cerely or no, 'tis impossible for any Man  
to tell? 

THIS Religion cannot be of Human  
Invention ; for Men would never deal so  
severely by themselves, as to lay ~~them-~~  
selves under such strict Laws ; nor could  
any Man be so foolish as to think he could  
succeed in an attempt to impose these Laws  
upon others, and to lay all Men ~~whatever~~  
under them without distinction ; or so arro-  
gant and conceited as to imagine he could  
oblige Mens Hearts and Consciences by a  
feign'd and pretended Authority of these  
Precepts ; much less could he ever hope  
to encourage Men to undergo the Hard-  
ships and Difficulties of obeying these Pre-  
cepts, by proposing such a Reward as is  
plainly beyond the desert of the best of  
Men, and so far out of our reach, and be-  
yond our thoughts, that we can never  
hope to attain it, unless we had an Ex-  
periment of the Thing itself, or a clear  
and exprefs Revelation of it from Him  
who is able to perform it, who can raise  
the Dead to Life, translate them into Hea-  
ven,

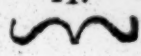


SERM. ven, and put them into the Possession of  
II. compleat and endless Happiness.



As This Religion is not of Human, so neither can it be look'd upon to be of Diabolical Invention. The Malice which that wicked Spirit bears to Mankind, would not suffer him to frame such Precepts of Purity and Perfection, and press Men to the Practice of universal Righteousness and Holiness, by the Prospect and Promise of such exceeding Rewards. He could never be guilty of such Folly and Indiscretion, as to invent a Religion so contrary to his Temper and Nature, and so destructive of his Kingdom. He loves Subjects like himself, and which would be Friends and not Enemies to his Designs: but such a Religion as this must necessarily alienate Mens Minds from him, and work them into a contrary Temper and Disposition.

IF it be objected here, That this indeed would be the Case, if these Promises were true, and these Precepts seriously enjoind, and with a design that they should be practis'd. I answer, That it matters not whether the Promises be true or false, so long as they are very proper to make Men  
endea-

endeavour to obey these Precepts; which S E R M.  
they certainly are, whether the Precepts II.  
were given them with that intent or not.   
So that the Devil, by framing such a Religion as this, would, even against his Will, be the occasion of promoting Piety and Holiness in the World; which is contrary to his Interest, and instead of making Men his Subjects, would make them the Servants of God.

IF it be reply'd, That he knew the Precepts to be so difficult, that Men would despair of ever fulfilling them, and so be alienated from all attempts of this nature, by which means they would revolt, and come over to his Kingdom. To this it may be answer'd, That he knew the Promises to be such, as to enable them to overcome these Difficulties. This would turn Despair into Hope, and put Men upon exerting their utmost strength to obey these Precepts, in order to obtain the Reward. There is nothing so difficult, which such a Reward will not make easy: The Hopes of Eternal Happiness, will quickly reconcile us to all the Miseries and *Sufferings of this present time*; and enable us to undergo  
any

S E R M.

II.

any Hardships and Severities, while we *have respect to that Recompence of Reward.* But it may be said, These Hopes are vain and groundless; 'tis hoping for incredible and impossible things. If so, it was altogether foolish and absurd to make these Promises. But why should they be thought impossible or incredible? As they are propos'd to us in these Books, they are not only credible, but *worthy of all acceptance* and serious belief. For the Books which contain these Promises, give us an Example and an Instance of the Certainty of the Things promis'd in our Saviour's Resurrection from the Dead, and Ascension into Heaven; so that they may safely be rely'd on for true. And we cannot suppose this Example to be forg'd by the Devil, the more effectually to excite Men to obey these Precepts. At this rate the Devil would make incredible things highly credible, and by deluding Men with vain Hopes, put them upon the serious Practice of real Piety and Virtue.

I conclude therefore, that the Things contain'd in the New Testament, and which the Writers of that Book affirm they receive'd



ceiv'd from G O D, were reveal'd to them S E R M.  
by Him, and are such as can have none II.  
but G O D for their Author. Upon any  
other Supposition but this, they are plain-  
ly foolish and absurd, and such as neither  
Men, nor Devils, either could, or would,  
of their own accord, feign or invent. But  
when they are ascrib'd to G O D, they ap-  
pear highly reasonable and worthy of  
G O D, who by his Infinite Power can  
easily perform all those things which come  
under the First Head; and by that Su-  
pream Authority which He has over us,  
may justly take upon Him to do whatever  
relates to the Second Head, *i. e.* to enjoin  
us such things as are ungrateful to our  
corrupt Nature, to give us such Precepts  
as will try our Obedience, and distinguish  
good Men from those that are bad. The  
Holiness of his Nature would naturally  
prompt Him to set us Rules of the utmost  
Purity and Perfection; and his Infinite  
Knowledge, his being a Discerner of the  
Thoughts of our Minds, gives Him a  
Right to require the Obedience of the  
Heart, of the Inner Man. And so for  
the Third Head, 'tis suitable to his Divine  
Majesty

S E R M. II. Majesty and Bounty, and his Infinite Goodness, to promise such a Reward as infinitely exceeds our best Performances, and our utmost Hopes and Expectations.

T H U S do the Contents of these Books, the Subject Matter of them, prove them to be of Divine Authority ; since neither Men nor Devils could be the original Authors and Inditers of such Things.

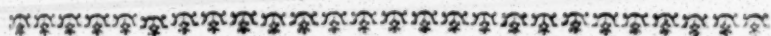


SERMON



## SERMON III.

*Of Free-Thinking, Falsely so called ; and of the Proofs of Revelation in general, and of the Christian Revelation in particular.*



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast that which is good.*



FROM the Matter of these SERM.  
Books, I shall proceed to III.  
consider,

*Secondly, THE Books themselves, to see whether they be of equal Authority, and have faithfully*



SER M. ly convey'd to us the whole of Chri-  
 III. stianity, both as to the Historical and  
 ~~~~~ Doctrinal Parts.

AND if I can shew that there is no reason why we should doubt of the Authority of these Books ; it will follow, that they ought to be received for, what they have been commonly reputed, the genuine Records of the Christian Religion.

NOW the principal Reasons which move Men to doubt of the Authority of any Book, are such as these: 1st, That the Writer of the Book is one who deserves no credit, *i. e.* one whose Knowledge of the Things about which he writes, or Veracity in relating them, may justly be call'd in question. 2^{dly}, That we cannot certainly know who was the Writer of the Book. 3^{dly}, That it is evident, or may reasonably be suspected, that the Book has been altered or corrupted. 4^{thly}, That upon other Accounts there are good Reasons why the Book should not be credited.

IF none of these Reasons take place in the New Testament, we have no cause to doubt of the Authority of that Book.

First then, One Reason which may in-
duce us to doubt of the Authority of any
Book, is this, that the Writer of that Book
is not to be credited; that he is one whose
Knowledge and Veracity may justly be
question'd. That it plainly appears or
may be justly suspected, that either this
Writer did not know the things he pre-
tends to relate, or has not related them
according to his knowledge, and that this
appears either by the Book itself, or other
evident tokens.

BUT nothing of this kind can be al-
ledg'd against the Writers of the New
Testament.

FOR either these Books were wrote
by those whose Names they bear, or by
others. If by others, it remains to be
shewn who they were, and to be prov'd
that the Books were wrote by them, and
not by those to whom they are commonly
ascrib'd; that we may examine their quali-
fications, and see whether they be Persons
fit to be credited. For if it be said, that it
is sufficient to overthrow the Authority
of the New Testament, that it cannot be
prov'd that the Books were wrote by those
whose Names they bear: I answer, That
F this

S E R M.
III.


S E R M. this does not affect the Truth of the Relation, nor by consequence the Truth of Christianity. The Contents or Matter of these Books, is a consideration distinct from the Books themselves, which are only the Means of conveying down this Matter to us; and that has already been prov'd to be from God. As to the Books themselves, tho' we could not prove them to be wrote by any particular Persons, yet even this would not affect the Truth of that Relation which they contain. It is sufficient to establish the Credit of the Books, that they were wrote by Persons who liv'd at, or near the Time, and Place, when, and where the things which they relate were transacted, that their Relations are confirm'd by the Testimony of other contemporary Writers, and not contradicted by any Persons of Note, no, not the bitterest Enemies of Christianity. All which is true of the Writers of the Books of the New Testament, whoever they were. But the particular Authors of these Books, is a Point which will come next under consideration.

AT present therefore, I say, that unless Proof can be brought that these Books were

were wrote by different Persons from those whose Names they bear, (which I conceive is more than can be done;) we may, for argument's sake, take it for granted that it does appear by whom they were wrote: For unless it be agreed who were the Authors, how can it be shewn that there is any ground (except from the Writings themselves, which is a Case I shall afterwards consider) to suspect that the Writers were either ignorant of the Matter about which they wrote, or unfaithful in their Relations. Which is the ground upon which the first reason of doubting of the Authority of any Book is built.

LET us then suppose the Reputed to be the Real Writers of these Books, and let us examine into their Characters and Qualifications, and see whether there be any ground to suspect them either of Ignorance or Infidelity.

St. *Matthew* and St. *John*, who have wrote the History of our Saviour's Life and Actions, were both of them his constant Followers and Disciples, and convers'd familiarly with Him, so that they could not be ignorant of the Things about which they wrote. They were present at most

SERM. of the Transactions which they relate, and
 III. bore a considerable part in them.

St. Mark and *St. Luke*, who have likewise wrote the same History, liv'd at the same Time with our Saviour, and in the Place where he had his Abode, and perform'd the Things recorded of Him.

ONE of these, *St. Mark*, was first, as some are of Opinion, a Companion of *St. Paul*, who was call'd in an extraordinary manner to be an Apostle and a Preacher of the Gospel, and was afterwards undoubtedly a Disciple and Companion of *St. Peter*, who was an Apostle, and intimately acquainted with our Saviour, and present at most of those Things which *St. Mark* has related. Nay, *St. Mark* may be suppos'd to have wrote nothing but what was in a manner dictated to him by *St. Peter*.

THE other, *St. Luke*, was an intimate Friend and Companion of *St. Paul*, from whom he receiv'd whatever was necessary to give him a perfect knowledge of every thing relating to the History which he has compil'd. The same Author compos'd the History of the *Acts* of the Apostles, which contains what was done by the Apostles after

after our Saviour had left them, especially those Things wherein *St. Paul* was more immediately concern'd. The greatest part of these Transactions *St. Luke* was present at, and might be fully inform'd of the rest by *St. Paul*, and also of every thing else relating to the other Apostles, and to the whole History of those Affairs which Saint *Paul* was present at, and thoroughly acquainted with. Besides, *St. Luke* also, as well as *St. Mark*, liv'd at the Time, and Place, when, and where these Things were done, so that he could not be ignorant of the Matters about which he wrote.

THIS is the Case of the four *Gospels*, and the *Acts* of the Apostles. Next to these, the Epistles of *St. Paul* make the most considerable part of the New Testament, some of which were wrote to whole Churches, and some to particular Persons. These contain several of the Doctrines of Christianity, some Historical Accounts of our Saviour and his Apostles, especially of *St. Paul* himself, and some Prophecies relating to the future State of the Church.

As to the Doctrinal part of *St. Paul's* Epistles, his knowledge of what he wrote upon that Subject can never be question'd,

S E R M. upon account of his natural Abilities, and
 III. his miraculous Call to be an Apostle and
 Preacher of the Gospel. What was Hi-
 storical, we have already observ'd, that he
 could not be ignorant of; and the Prophe-
 tical part may justly be suppos'd equally
 known to him, who was so near to our
 Saviour, and who would not pretend to
 knowledge of those future Events which
 were never discover'd to him.

BESIDES *St. Paul's*, there are also Ep-
 istles of *St. James, Peter, John*, and *Jude*
 who were also our Saviour's Apostles, and
 cannot, for that reason, be suppos'd ig-
 norant of the Things about which they
 wrote.

THE Book of the *Revelations*, which
 is mostly Prophetical, and contains a Re-
 lation of future Events which were dis-
 cover'd to the Author in a Vision, is of
 equal Authority with those I have already
 mention'd; since the Author, whether that
 was *St. John the Evangelist*, or any other,
 affirms that he saw that Vision, and tells
 us when and where it befel him, so that
 he could not but know whether he had
 such a Vision, and what the Vision was.

FROM this brief Survey which we have
 taken

taken of the Books of the New Testament, SERM.
III.
it appears, that if the several Books were wrote by those whose Names they bear, there can be no ground to doubt of their knowledge of those Matters which they have deliver'd to us.

LET us see, in the next place, whether there be any likelihood of their being unfaithful in their Relations; whether they would relate to us for truth, what they knew to be false. And here, perhaps, some will suspect them of this, because they themselves were so much interested and concern'd in the Matters about which they write, and might be tempted to deviate from the Truth, in order to set off themselves, and make their own story good.

BUT when we consider, *First*, That these Writers were not only Christians, but intimate Friends and Acquaintance of our Saviour's, or constant Companions of those who were so, we cannot entertain any suspicions of this kind; since we know how strictly Christ, and his Religion, forbid all manner of Fraud and Deceit, all Lying, False-witnessing, Dissimulation, and the like, and enjoin every Man to speak the Truth from his Heart; and therefore

SERM. it will add much to the Authority of these
 III. Books, if it appears that they were wrote
 by those whose Names they bear, or by any
 other Persons in the same Circumstances,
 and of like Qualifications with them.

THEY were not interested or concern'd
 in the things which they have related, up-
 on any other account, than as they sincere-
 ly lov'd Christ, and valu'd his Religion;
 and therefore it would have been absurd in
 itself, and inconsistent with their design,
 to have impos'd any false Accounts upon
 the World. And this holds not only of
 the Historical, but also of the Doctrinal
 parts of the New Testament. For what
 could such Men as these possibly propose
 to themselves in delivering any false Doc-
 trine, in misguiding Men to their Eter-
 nal Ruine, when it was in their Power
 to teach them the Way of Salvation?

So that if we consider the Qualifica-
 tions of the Writers of these Books, there
 is no ground to suspect either that they
 knew not the Truth of what they wrote,
 or have not faithfully related it. If there
 be any suspicions of this kind, they must
 be fetch'd from the Writings themselves,
 from their containing different and con-
 tradictory

tradictory Accounts, or Things in them. S E R M.
felves manifestly false and absurd. III.

As to the different and contradictory Accounts which these Books are suppos'd to contain ; there are many things which at first sight may seem to differ from, or contradict one another ; though they really do not so, but may easily be reconcil'd ; as has been shewn by several who have treated particularly on this Subject. And whenever this happens, it is more in the Historical parts of this Book than in any other Points, and this too in things of little or no moment. So that this difference is an argument of the Truth of what these Authors have wrote ; that there was no fraud or collusion in the Case ; that what they wrote, was not feign'd or agreed on by common consent ; but that the Books were wrote by different Persons, without consulting one another for that purpose ; and that they were under no other influence but that of Truth, which work'd so forcibly upon them, as to produce this agreement in the History which they have compil'd ; though some of them, retaining some Circumstances of the Actions they relate, which others forgot,

SERM. got, might differ from others, in their
 III. Accounts of the same Things.

IN the Doctrinal part of these Books, there is no difference or contradiction among these Writers; but, on the contrary, so strict a harmony and agreement, that this alone advances the Credit of this Book, above that of any other which delivers the Doctrines and Precepts of any particular Sect; for 'tis seldom that we find so great an Agreement, and such an exact Consistency in a short Book wrote by a single Person, as there is in the New Testament, which contains the Writings of so many different Persons.

As for things which are in themselves false and absurd, none such can be produc'd out of the New Testament; and where-ever any seem so, they are in such small Matters as cannot weaken the Credit of that Book, in Points of greater Moment.

WE cannot doubt, for the Reasons already alledg'd, but that the Doctrines of Christianity are truly deliver'd to us in the Books of the New Testament: Had there been any falsity or forgery in these, they had never been receiv'd from the
 Beginning,

Beginning, by so many wise and good Men, without any hesitation. 'Tis impossible to shew that the Writers of the New Testament have falsify'd any thing of this kind, but by producing some Doctrine or Precept of Christianity which contradicts some passage in the New Testament. But whence shall we fetch any such Doctrine or Precept? and by what Authority can we prove it to be Christian, which is not inferior to the Authority of this Book, which contains the whole of the Christian Religion, and from whence alone all our knowledge of it must be had? We cannot deduce any such Doctrine or Precept either from Reason, or any passage out of the Old Testament. Reason, however safely it may be rely'd on in things within its proper Province, is no guide in the present Case. For Christianity being a Divine Revelation, we cannot, at this distance, know what the Doctrines of it are, but from that Revelation as it is recorded in these Books, and not from the bare use and exercise of our own Reason.

As to any passages which may be produc'd out of the Old Testament to this purpose,

SERM. pose, they are of no force, 'till it be, de-
 III. termin'd in what sense those Passages are
 to be understood: For we cannot but own
 that the Christian Revelation gives a different Interpretation of several Passages and Prophecies in the Old Testament, relating to Christ and his Religion, than what at first we should have put upon them, or perhaps should ever have taken them in, had they not been so interpreted by that Revelation.

UPON the Whole therefore, there is as little ground from the Writings of the New Testament, as from the Writers of that Book, to suspect that the Accounts which are there given us of the Christian Religion are either false, or not to be depended upon for true.

I proceed to the *Second* ground of doubting of the Authority of any Book; and that is, our not knowing the True Writer or Author of that Book.

FOR it may be objected by those who, in other respects, own the Truth of Christianity, that since it cannot be prov'd that the Books of the New Testament were wrote by those whose Names they bear, and who are the reputed Authors of them,

it is uncertain who wrote them ; since none can be fix'd on so likely to be the Authors as the reputed ones ; and if it appears not who wrote these Books, what reason have we to credit them, either in the Doctrinal or Historical parts ?

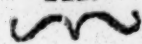
THE Credit of any Historical Book relies chiefly upon this, that we know the Writer was acquainted with the Facts which he relates, and was one who would not falsify his Account. In like manner, as to Doctrinal Points, if we are to give credit to any Writer in this Case, 'tis necessary that we should know him to be one who was thoroughly acquainted with the Doctrine which he pretends to deliver : but without knowing the Author, we cannot know this, nor determine any thing about him.

IN answer to all this, I observe, That here are two things affirm'd or taken for granted, neither of which is true. One is, That we know nothing of the Writers of the New Testament. The other is, That where we know not the Writer of any Book, there is hardly any thing left whereon we may ground our belief, either of the Doctrinal, or Historical part of that Book.

As

S E R M.

III.



As to the first of these, That we know nothing of the Writers of the Books of the New Testament : I answer, That if we know who was the Writer of any ancient Book, we know who were the Writers of the Books of the New Testament ; nay, we know much more of the Writers of these Books, than we do of any other ancient Book : And therefore, if no body doubts of the Author of any ancient Book, or denies that Person to be the Author to whom the Book has been constantly and universally ascrib'd by the common consent of learned Men, unless there be some probable Reason, or plain Proof, to the contrary ; we ought not to doubt of the Writers of the Books of the New Testament, or deny those to be the Writers of them, who have been so reputed, unless we can bring some probable Reason, or plain Proof, to the contrary.

AND here we shall find that we have much less reason to doubt of the Authors of the New Testament, than we have to doubt of the Author of any Book of that nature, I mean of any Book of great Antiquity. For since our knowledge of the Author of any ancient Book, depends more
upon

upon the testimony of those who liv'd at S E R M.
the time when that Book was wrote, or III.
presently after, and the constant consent
and agreement of learned Men in that
Point, than upon any other Proof; what
Book can we name so ancient as the New
Testament, which has so many testimonies
of this kind as that has, and such a con-
stant agreement among wise Men concern-
ing the Author of it?

IF we consult what *Eusebius* has said of
this matter in several places of his History,
we shall find, that down to his time, that
is, for the space of about two hundred and
fifty years after these Books were wrote,
there was never any doubt but that the
four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, all
St. Paul's Epistles, excepting that to the
Hebrews, the First Epistle of St. Peter,
and the First of St. John; I say, there
was no doubt but that all these were
written by the Persons whose Names they
bear, and that these Persons were such as
they have been already describ'd, for their
Ability and Integrity.

THE same Author further informs us,
that there were many Writers who liv'd
at the time when these Books were pub-
lish'd,

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III.

lish'd, or soon after, who have given their testimony to this truth, that all these Books of the New Testament were wrote by those to whom they are commonly ascrib'd. And this appears in a great measure to us at this day, from those ancient Writings which are come down to us of *Justin Martyr*, *Irenæus*, *Clemens Alexandrinus*, who liv'd in the next Age, especially *Justin*, who is the most ancient of these Writers, and whose testimony is of great weight in the present Question.

AFTER these, succeeded great numbers of wise and prudent Men, who all agreed in the Authors of these Books: And amidst all the Disputes and Differences among Christians, there were none of any Reputation, who ever deny'd those Books to be wrote by those whose Names they bear. There were some indeed, in early times, who were more Jews than Christians, who rejected *St. Paul's* Epistles, but did not deny *St. Paul* to be the Author of them; on the contrary, they profess'd to reject them, because *St. Paul*, who wrote them, had (in their Opinion) betrayed the Cause of *Moses*, and given up the Authority of the Jewish Law. For some

such

such Reasons as this, there were others, SERM.
III.
who rejected other Books of the New Testament; tho' they did not deny those to be the Authors of them, who were commonly so reputed.

BUT tho' we should not doubt of the Authors of the Books already mention'd, it will be said, that we may justly question who were the Authors of the other Books of the New Testament; the Epistle of St. James, the Second of St. Peter, the Second and Third of St. John, that of St. Jude, and the Book of the Revelations. To this I answer, That tho' it has been doubted, concerning all these Books, for some time, by some Parties, whether they were written by those Authors, under whose Names they are now receiv'd; yet they were always admitted by others; and they who at first rejected them because they were unsatisfy'd about their Authors, were afterwards, upon further enquiry, satisfy'd in this point, otherwise they would never have receiv'd them: and therefore now there is as great, if not greater credit due to them, than if they had never been question'd at all; because they have undergone a stricter examination

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S E R M. in this respect, than those which have pass'd
 III. silently without being ever question'd.

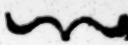
BUT, *Secondly*, Though we were ignorant of the true Author or Writer of any Book, it does not follow that the Book is of no Authority, either in Point of History, or Doctrine, or of less Authority than it would be, if we knew the Author.

FOR if it appears that the Book was esteem'd of sufficient Authority by those who knew whether the Contents of it were true, or false: If the Facts which it relates, be confirm'd by the testimony of those who liv'd in, or near those times, when they were done; and the Doctrines it delivers, be in like manner attested for the Doctrines of Christianity, by other Christian Writers of the same, or the succeeding Age: If these Books have been constantly appeal'd to, and cited in all Disputes about these Matters; this is enough to establish their Credit, without knowing certainly who were the true Writers or Authors of them.

AND this is the Case of the Books of the New Testament, even of those whose Authors were not agreed on: They were

look'd

look'd upon as containing true and genuine Accounts of Christianity, and always appeal'd to as such.

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III.


Thirdly, Another ground of doubting of the Authority of any Book, is, when it appears, or there are just grounds to suspect that it has been deprav'd and corrupted, alter'd and chang'd from what it was when it was first written.

NOW this depravation, or change, must either be Universal, of the whole History and Doctrine of the Gospel; or only of some particular Places, by which the whole History or Doctrine will not be chang'd. For if this depravation be only of part of the History or Doctrine, or of some particular places, by which the History or Doctrine would be chang'd; this would quickly appear from the disagreement of these parts with others, and the contradiction there would be between them, especially in Matters of Doctrine; and the New Testament would then be a Book whose several parts often contradicted one another, or at least could not be reconcil'd without great difficulty. But nothing of this nature can, with any appearance of truth, be said of the New Testament,

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III.

wherein there is a perfect Harmony and Agreement; so that if we consider how many different Writings, of different Persons, that Book contains, the exact Agreement there is among all these, as has been already observ'd, will, to an unprejudic'd Person, highly advance the Credit and Authority of that Book.

THAT there should be an universal Alteration or Depravation of the whole History, and the Doctrine of this Book, is by no means credible, nor even possible, and is inconsistent with what has been already prov'd, that the several Books were wrote by those whose Names they bear. If this Alteration is only in some few particular Places, which will neither alter the Doctrine nor the History, it is of no moment, and ought not to lessen the credit of these Books. If it be said, that this Alteration in lesser Matters, gives us just ground to suspect the same in Matters of greater Moment: I answer, that it cannot be prov'd that there ever has been any such Alterations; on the contrary, we have very good Arguments to prove any thing of that kind impossible. But this is a Subject which I shall further examine, when

when I come to consider the Objections SERM.
III.
which are made against the Authority of
these Books.

THE *Fourth* and *Last* ground of doubting of the Authority of any Book, is, that upon other Accounts there are good Reasons why the Books should not be credited: I say, upon other Accounts besides those already mention'd, and these can be no other than the Testimonies of credible Persons against the Authority of these Books.

BUT there is no occasion to insist much upon this, since no such Testimonies can be produc'd; on the contrary, it appears, from what has been already said, that these Books have always had the Approbation of wise and good Men, from the first Ages of the Church, down to the present Times. Indeed, if these Books had been rejected, or doubted of by any of the Antients who were of Credit and Reputation, and it was evident from authentick History, that they did actually refuse their Assent to these Books, tho' they gave no Reason for it; it would be sufficient to weaken, if not to destroy the Credit of these Books: But since, as I said, no such Testimonies can

SERM. be produc'd, since it was never doubted
 III. by Persons of any note or consideration,
 who were competent Judges of the Matter, but that these Books contain'd the genuine Records of Christianity, and were of supreme Authority in determining all necessary Points of Faith and Practice; there can be no grounds of Suspicion from this Quarter, and the Credit of these Books remains firm and entire, notwithstanding any thing which can be suggested to weaken or overthrow it.

THUS I have consider'd both the Matter of these Books, and the Books themselves; and have shewn that the Matter which they contain could not be of Human or Diabolical Contrivance or Composition; and that the Books themselves have convey'd this Matter down to us, with the utmost fidelity and exactness. Upon both which Accounts they deserve our Regard, not only comparatively, beyond all other Books whatever, but absolutely, and in the highest degree, as containing nothing but what is strictly true; and not only so, but what we are oblig'd to hearken to, as it comes from God.

BUT

BUT since there have been some Ob-
 jections rais'd against the Books themselves,
 in order to weaken their Authority, it will
 not be improper, in the next place, to con-
 sider and answer those Objections.

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AND here we are told, (a) that the
 present *Samaritan* Rabbies receive the Five
 Books of *Moses*, (the Copy whereof is
 very different from ours) as their entire
 Scripture; [together with a *Chronicon* or
 History of themselves from *Moses's* time,
 quite different from that contain'd in the
 Historical Books of the Old Testament.]

THAT the *Samaritans* receive only the
Pentateuch, or the Five Books of *Moses*,
 for their Scripture, is very true; and
 very good Reasons may be assign'd for this,
 from the State and Condition of that
 People, from their Schism, and their cor-
 rupt and idolatrous Worship (b). This
Pentateuch, or Copy of the Law, was ori-
 ginally the same with that of the *Jews*, (c)
 from whom they receiv'd it, that they

(a) Discourse of Free Thinking, pag. 53.

(b) Vide Proleg. 11. in Bibl. Polyglott. sect. 9.

(c) *Pentateuchi Codex (Samaritanus) idem fere est cum*
Hebræo, Characteribus Hebraicis antiquis descriptus, quos Ju-
dæi, reduces in Assyriacos quibus hodie utuntur permutarunt,
unde non inter Versiones, sed inter Textus Hebraici exempla-
ria vetusta numerari possit. Supra, sect. 1.

SERM. might be instructed in the Worship of the
 III. True God. This Book they preserv'd amongst them; and from several Circumstances which might be mention'd, it appears that they could not make an universal change and alteration of it, or corrupt it to any very great degree. Had this been done, the Jews, who, upon account of their Schism, were their greatest Enemies, and hated them with a perfect hatred, would not have fail'd to lay this to their charge, and reproach'd them with it, which we do not find they did.

AND it appears further from the Book it self, which has since been printed, and carefully collated with the Hebrew, (a) as well as from some other ancient Manuscripts of it which have been view'd, that it differs as little from the Hebrew *Pentateuch*, as any two Copies of any other

(a) *Aliam igitur auctoritatem non concedimus eorum Pentateucho quam aliis antiquis exemplaribus, quæ injuriâ temporum, vel scribarum negligentia nævos & maculas quædam contrahere poterant, quæ ex aliorum codicum collatione maxime Hebraicorum veterumque interpretum, aliisque mediis, de quibus in Proleg. de variantibus Lectionibus actum est, corrigi & emendari possunt. Supra, sect. 17. versus finem.*

Walton's Considerator Consider'd, pag. 180, &c.

Scaliger.

Morinus.

Author differ from each other in ancient S E R M.
Manuscripts. III.

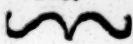
T H E R E are indeed in the *Samaritan* Pentateuch some Variations from the *Hebrew*, and some wilful Corruptions of it, as that in particular about Mount *Gerizim*, which is naturally accounted for (a) from the History of that People; so that it is not as authentick as the *Hebrew*, nor can pretend to stand in competition with it. But there is no foundation in the difference there is between the *Samaritan* and the *Hebrew* Pentateuch, to insinuate that they are not the same, but distinct Books, and that consequently it cannot be known which of the two, or whether either of them be genuine, or whether they be not both of them equally false and spurious.

S O M E of the most material variations or corruptions of the *Samaritans* Pentateuch, seem to have been occasion'd by the Controversies between them and the

(a) *Et si vero authenticam huic exemplari non attribuamus auctoritatem, non tamen omnem ejus usum negamus, imo multum utilitatis ad Hebraicum Textum illustrandum & verum in locis perplexis & obscuris Scripturæ sensum indagandum conferre statuimus. Supra, sect. 18. initio.*

SERM. *Jews*: And it is altogether as unjust to
 III. argue from thence against the Truth of
 these Books in general, as it would be to
 argue against the Truth of some Books of
 the New Testament, because the Papists
 have, in some of their Versions, made bold
 to corrupt the Text in favour of their
 Errors (a). The truth is, the small va-
 riation of the *Samaritan Pentateuch* from
 the *Hebrew* for above two thousand Years,
 while these Nations were at utter enmity
 with one another, is a most convincing
 Proof that the Jewish Bibles have been
 preserv'd with great fidelity and exactness,
 and are as free from corruptions and inter-
 polations, as, in the nature of the thing,
 is possible. 'Tis well known how very
 careful the Jews were in this matter; how
 they divided their Bible into several
 Sections, number'd the Words, and even
 the Letters of it, and kept the most exact
 and minute account of every thing relating
 to it. So that it will be very weak and

(a) Note, A very remarkable Instance of this we have
 in a *French Translation* of the New Testament, printed
 at *Bordeaux* in 1686. The Book is very scarce; but the
 Reader may see several Passages of the New Testament
 which have been falsify'd in that Edition, in the *Memoirs*
of Literature, for the Month of *February*, 1712.

vain to make any attempt upon the SERM.
Credit and Authority of the Hebrew III.
Text. 

To proceed to what is next objected, and comes nearer to us: — We are told, (a) That the Rabbies among the common Herd of Jews, receive, for Scripture, the twenty four Books of the Old Testament; the Priests of the Roman Church, of the English and other Protestant Churches, receive for Scripture, the twenty four Books of the Old Testament, and all the Books of the New: But the Church of *Rome* receives several other Books call'd *Apocrypha*, which all the Protestant Churches utterly reject, but the Church of *England*, which pays some small Regard to them.

'Tis not my present Business to descend to those Controversies which are among Christians; but 'tis my Business to shew that those Controversies which are amongst Christians, are no just Objection against Christianity it self, nor any argument against the Truth and Certainty of our Holy Religion.

(a) *Discourse of Free Thinking*, pag. 53.

SERM.

III.

HERE then we have a considerable number of Tracts, own'd by all Christians whatever, to be given us at divers times by God himself. But here a difficulty is rais'd about the certain determinate number of those Books which make up the Scripture; some rejecting those as spurious, which others receive as genuine.

BUT does it therefore follow that all are to be rejected? Because every individual Book is not own'd to be the Word of God by every individual Christian, or every Sect or Denomination of Christians; are we without any more ado to lay them all aside, and to conclude that there is no such thing as Scripture, no Book at all which has any just pretence to Divine Authority?

THIS seems to be the drift of some Mens reasoning; and this will hold against all Writings whatever, especially such as are ancient, and of long standing. And yet it was never look'd upon as any argument that no Books were wrote by the Authors whose Names they bear, because some have been falsely ascrib'd to them, and put upon the World as theirs whose they were not.

H E R E

H E R E therefore we must examine Mat-
ters, and consult Antiquity, and see what
Books have the best Title to Divine Autho-
rity, and were universally own'd to be of
Divine Authority in the first Ages. And
since there are some, nay many, whose Au-
thority was never question'd, and others
whose Authority, tho' once question'd, came
presently afterwards to be settled and agreed
on by a fair and full Examination: If we
have a mind to be satisfy'd ourselves, and
will not rely upon the Judgment of others,
let us go over that Examination again, and
we shall find their Judgment to be right
and well grounded. But we cannot ar-
gue against the Being or Authority of all
such Books in general, from the different
Opinions which some have maintain'd
concerning them, and from all Mens not
immediately agreeing which they were.

M O R E particularly, with regard to
the Books of the New Testament, which
contain the Scheme of the Christian Re-
ligion; there have been Disputes about
the Authority of some of these Books;
there have been false Gospels, as well as
false Christs: But these were very early
distinguish'd from the genuine; and those
which

SERM. which we now receive, were soon estab-
 III. lish'd in that Credit and Authority which
 they still remain possess'd of; and indeed
 were never doubted of at all.

THE *Acts* of the Apostles, and all Saint
Paul's Epistles, were universally receiv'd,
 excepting that to the *Hebrews*, the Autho-
 rity of which, and more especially the Au-
 thor, tho' doubted at first by some, was
 soon after own'd and agreed to. The like
 is true of the other Books of the New Te-
 stament, excepting the Epistles of St. *James*
 and St. *Jude*, the 2d Epistle of St. *Peter*,
 the two last of St. *John*, and the *Revela-*
tions, which were not universally agreed to,
 have been written by those whose Names
 they bear, tho' the Authority of the Books
 themselves was not question'd (a). And
 thus the Canon of the New Testament came
 by degrees to be settled and adjusted; tho'
 perhaps it may be difficult, as well as it is
 needless, to date the precise Time when it
 was universally own'd and receiv'd.

BUT suppose that these Matters were
 more uncertain than they are represented

(a) Vid. *Eusebii Hist. Ecclesiast.* lib. 3. cap. 3, 24, 25.

to be, what would be the Consequence of S E R M.
this? Does the Truth of Christianity de- III.
pend upon the Time when the Books of

the New Testament were all formally put
into one Body, and universally receiv'd?
No; the Truth of Christianity (as has
before been observ'd) depends upon the
Truth of the Facts relating to our blessed
Saviour, upon the Accounts which the
Gospels have given us of Him, of what
He did and taught. If these Facts be tru-
ly related, and these Accounts be right,
which has been already prov'd; Christia-
nity is true, and the Foundations of it re-
main firm and unshaken, whenever the
Books which make up the New Testament
were collected and put together into one
Volume. Tho' (as it was but just now
hinted) 'tis very well known, and ought
not to be dissembled or conceal'd by those
who are sincere Lovers of Truth, that the
four Gospels, and St. Paul's Epistles were
receiv'd from the Beginning, and always
receiv'd uncontested; and these give us a ve-
ry full and noble View of Christianity.

BUT supposing we are agreed about
what Books are to be receiv'd for Scrip-
ture;

S E R M.

III.

ture; we differ, it seems, very much about the Authority of Scripture, and the Degrees of Inspiration with which these Books are penn'd; so that we know not what Credit, or whether any is due to them; how far they may be rely'd upon, or whether they are to be rely'd upon at all.

SOME, it seems, (a) contend that every *Thought and Word* are inspir'd; some, that *the Thoughts* are inspir'd, and not the Words; some, that *those Thoughts only* are inspir'd which relate to *Fundamentals*; and others, that *the Books* were written by honest Men with great Care and Faithfulness, without any Inspiration either with respect to the *Thoughts or the Words*.

NOW I cannot see that the Truth of Christianity will suffer upon account of any of these Opinions. If we take the last, and allow no more than this, that the Writers were Men of Honesty, and common Abilities, we have no reason to doubt of, or disbelieve their Accounts. For why might not they transmit down

(a) Discourse of Free-Thinking, pag. 55.

in Writing, the Life and Doctrine of our **S E R M.**
Blessed Saviour, as well as the Disciples of **III.**
Philosophers did the Tenets of their several
Masters. The Accounts which the Evan-
gelists have given us in their Writings, are
of things which they saw, and heard them-
selves, or had from those who did so. They
liv'd in the Time and Place, when and
where the Things which they write of
were publicly transacted ; for which rea-
son, their Writings deserve greater Credit
than any other Writings whatever. For
how few of these things, related by other
Historians, are such, as they themselves
were present at, and saw ? 'Tis needless to
mention *Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Livy,*
Suetonius, Curtius, and other Historians
who have given us an account of the
Assyrian or Persian, the *Greek or Roman*
Affairs, and who have wrote of things
that were done many Ages before they
were born, and in such Parts of the World
as were very remote from their own Ha-
bitations. I shall instance only in one
Writer, and that is *Cornelius Tacitus,* in
that part of his History, where he is
giving an Account of the Destruction of

H

Jeru-

S E R M.

III.

Jerusalem, and takes occasion to tell us the whole story of the City and People of the *Jews* from their first beginning (a). 'Tis scarce credible how many groundless and childish Tales, what stupid and evidently false Accounts that celebrated Historian has heap'd together, and which he might easily have known to be such even in *Rome* it self where he liv'd, from the great numbers of *Jews* of all sorts and ranks which resorted thither, and especially from the History of *Josephus* which was then in being, and at the Emperor's command was repositied in the publick Library.

BUT the Writers of the History of the Gospel, if they had but common Sense and Understanding, could not be mistaken in the Accounts which they have given us of our Blessed Saviour ; because they were his constant Companions and Followers, and had all the Opportunities imaginable of informing themselves fully in every Particular about which they have wrote. Nor

(a) *Histor. lib. 5. p. 550. Sed quia famose urbis supremum diem tradituri sumus, congruens videtur primordia episcopi aperire, &c. Edit. Amstel. cum Notis variorum, 8vo. T. 2.*

is it conceivable that they should impose S E R M.
upon the World, by relating those things III.
which they knew to be false, or did not
know to be true. There was nothing
which they could propose to themselves in
this which could induce them to it. And
if they had done it, they would certainly
have been detected ; since the things they
wrote about were then publicly known,
and what others were acquainted with as
well as themselves.

THEY seem to have wrote without
any other views but that of Truth ; and
their Writings have all the marks of Sin-
cerity and Integrity that can be desir'd.
Upon the whole therefore, If we give
credit to any History at all, we cannot
deny it to the Gospel, which has in many
respects the advantage over all other Histo-
ries whatever. And if the History of the
Gospel be true, the Christian Religion is
founded on Divine Revelation, and demands
our assent, as coming from G O D.

BUT suppose the History of the Gospel,
as it was written at first, was a true Ac-
count of our Saviour, of all that He did
and taught ; How shall we be sure that

SERM. this History is come down to us entire and
III. uncorrupted? And if it be, by what
Rules shall we interpret it; and how shall
we be absolutely certain of the true sense
and meaning of several Passages in it?
There are several Difficulties which have
been endeavour'd to be rais'd upon these
and such-like Points, which I shall con-
sider in my next Discourse.





SERMON IV.

That the present *Scriptures* are
Genuine and Uncorrupt;
And the Objection taken
from the many various
Readings, Answer'd.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast
that which is good.*



N Discourſing upon theſe
Words, I propos'd,

I. To enquire what the SERM.
Apoſtle means by *proving all* IV.
things ; to ſtate the true Notion of that
H 3 private

S E R M.

IV.

private Judgment, or Freedom of Thought, which every Man ought to exercise in Religious Matters, and to shew wherein it consists.

UNDER this Head, I laid down some Rules which are necessary to be observ'd, and without which we can never reason justly, or think freely upon any Subject; such as these: — Possessing our selves with a sincere love of Truth, for its own sake. Not being afraid of Truth, or any of the Consequences of it. Pursuing our Enquiries with the utmost Sincerity and Impartiality. Using all manner of Helps which God has afforded us. And firmly resolving to embrace the Truth whenever we find it; to yield up our selves to it and be govern'd by it. I propos'd,

II. To consider what that *Free-Thinking* is which is Falsely so call'd, and which some have lately taken up; and to shew how much it differs from that in the Text.

AND because I laid down some particular Rules necessary to be observ'd in true *Free-Thinking*, I propos'd to examine the present *Free-Thinking* by these Rules.

THE

THE *First* of these was, Possessing our-
selves with a Love of Truth, for its own
fake.

SERM.
IV.
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WHETHER we thus love Truth, will
appear by our entertaining Propositions
with greater or less degrees of Assurance
than the Proofs they are built upon will
warrant.

AND this naturally leads me to con-
sider some of the principal Arguments or
Objections which the present *Free-Think-
ers* have rais'd against Reveal'd Religion
in general, or the Christian Revelation in
particular.

THE *First* Objection which I took
notice of, was that which they have rais'd
against the Reality and Existence of a Di-
vine Revelation in general; where I en-
deavour'd to shew that a Divine Reve-
lation is not, in the nature of the thing,
impossible; and therefore that the many
false Pretences which have been made to it,
is no Proof that there never was any such
thing, or that God never made an extra-
ordinary Revelation of his Will to Man-
kind. On the contrary, these false Pre-
tences are rather a Proof of the Possibility
and actual Existence of such a Revelation.

SERM.

IV.

THE next enquiry which the *Free-Thinkers* propose to make, is, Whether the Christian Religion is founded on Divine Revelation? or, Whether that be a Divine Revelation on which it is founded; or only a meer Dream and Delusion, Enthusiasm and Imagination in those who first believ'd it, or a Cheat and Imposture which they have put upon the World?

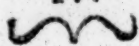
AND here I observ'd, that notwithstanding all the unfair Suggestions and base Insinuations of the *Free-Thinkers*, that Christianity is either a Cheat and an Imposture, or a meer Dream and Delusion, and upon a level with Heathenish Frauds and Superstitions; they have declin'd the fair way of tryal and examination, and the only way whereby we can come to a determination of this Question, and that is, To enquire whether the Gospel-History be true? For if the Facts, there recorded, be true, Christianity is founded on Divine Revelation.

THE next Objections which are rais'd by the *Free-Thinkers*, relate to the Scriptures, and the different Opinions which are held about them. Some of these I examin'd in my last Discourse, and endeavour'd

your'd to shew, in several Particulars, that none of these different Opinions are any argument against the Truth of Religion, or weaken the Credit and Authority of the Holy Scriptures; but that we may still believe our Bibles to be the Word of God, and to contain all things necessary to Salvation. But admitting all this, that we have the Scriptures, and that these Scriptures are of undoubted Authority, or rather were so when they were first written; How shall we know that we have them as they were written at first, and that they are come down to us entire and uncorrupted? Several Doubts are rais'd upon this Head, which I shall now consider.

WE are told (*a*) of a design which was set on foot in the Sixth Century by *Anastasi* the Emperor, of making a general Alteration of the four Gospels. This is recorded in the *Chronicon* of *Victor Tununensis* who liv'd and wrote in that Age. His words are to this effect: — At *Constantinople*, in the Consulship of *Mesjalla*, at the Command of the Emperor *Anastasi*, the Holy Gospels, as written

SERM. by plain unartful Evangelists, are corrected, and amended.
IV.



THEY who have rais'd this Objection, own whence they had it, and who they are beholden to for their knowledge of this Passage: But 'tis extreamly unfair and disingenuous to produce the Objection in publick, and at the same time to take no notice of what is said in Answer to it, in the very same place of that Book from whence they had it.

IN Answer therefore to this Objection, I observe,

First, THAT the Truth of this History rests upon the sole Credit of one single Author. This Passage occurs in no Book whatever but the *Chronicon* of *Victor*. No other Writer has made any mention of it, excepting *Isidorus Hispalensis* in his *Chronicon*; and he has done nothing more than barely transcrib'd *Victor's* Words. He tells us, that *Anastasius* reign'd eighteen Years; that he espous'd the Error, or Heresy, of the *Acephali*, and banish'd the Bishops who defended the Synod of *Chalcedon*: And then it follows, — That he also corrected, or found fault with, and amended the Gospels, as written by simple

ple and illiterate, plain and unartful S E R M.
IV.
Men.

Secondly, It does not appear from *Victor's* words, that this was any design of forgery, or falsifying the History of the Gospels, or the Doctrines contain'd in them; much less of suppressing or altering the Originals: but only of publishing the Gospel History a-new, in purer and politer Language, in a better and more beautiful Style. This, 'tis probable, is what some of the Sophists and Orators of that City, who were disgusted at the Plainness and Barbarity of the Gospel-Greek, had a mind to do, and interceded with the Emperor for his Leave. And he might possibly yield to their Request, and agree to such a Reformation of the Gospel as this; and perhaps the Work might be actually begun.

SOMETHING of this nature is the most that can be inferr'd from this obscure Passage. And this might have been done without any detriment to the Gospel, or diminution of its Authority; the Originals of which might still remain in their native plainness and simplicity. Of this nature are the Versions and Paraphrases

SERM. phrases which have been made of the
 IV. Gospels, and other Books of the New
 Testament, which are so far from doing
 any prejudice to the Originals, that they
 are of great use, and contribute very much
 to the understanding of the Text, by ex-
 pressing that in a more easy and familiar
 Style, which the sacred Writers express in
 more difficult, and, to us, unusual Lan-
 guage; by filling up those Periods and
 and connecting them together, which they
 have left abrupt, and seemingly incoherent.
 This seems to have been (a) *Tatian's* design,
 in his Paraphrase upon *St. Paul's* Epistles,
 in which, as (b) *Eusebius* tells us, he is
 said to have amended the Construction of
 the Apostle's Language. But that Para-
 phrase being lost, 'tis difficult to deter-
 mine any thing certainly about it.

Thirdly, WHATEVER this Design upon
 the Gospels was, it does not appear that it
 was ever put in Execution. 'Tis certain
 that the Performance was never publish'd:

(a) Τῆ ἡ ἀποστόλου φασὶ τολμῆσαι τινὰς αὐτὸν μετε-
 φράσαι φωνὰς, ὡς ἐπιθροισθῆναι αὐτῶν τὸ φράσαι
 σύνταξιν

(b) *Hist. Eccles. lib. 4. cap. 29. pag. 150, 151. Edit.*
Valesii. Parisiis, 1651.

For the bare Report of such an Alteration, the very name of New Gospels, would have rais'd the greatest Commotions in the East, and quickly set all in a flame ; as much lesser Matters, we know, frequently did. This would have so incens'd the People, and met with such opposition as would have endanger'd the Emperor himself, who was very far from being belov'd at that time.

Fourthly, HAD this been a wicked design to corrupt the Truth and Purity of the Gospel ; and had the Emperor come into such a Design, and succeeded in it ; if this false Gospel, or any part of it, had ever come abroad, and been publish'd to the World, the Historians of that time who have been so particular in describing the other Impieties and Villanies of *Anastasi*, would not have fail'd to have added this to the rest, to have set it out in its worst Colours, and left it upon Record to all Posterity, as a standing Monument of his Infamy and Reproach : Whereas there is no mention made of this Particular by any Writer but *Victor*, and *Isidorus* who copy'd from him.

Fifthly,

SERM.

IV

Fifthly, BESIDES the silence of History in this Matter, we have another more convincing Argument that no such alter'd Gospels did ever, in Fact, appear and obtain in the World. For the Writers before *Anastasi*'s time, the Greek and Latin Fathers of the first four Centuries, are very full of Citations out of the New Testament, insomuch that there are but few Passages in that Book but what are produc'd at large by one or other of these Writers: and yet their Citations agree with the present MSS. and Printed Copies; which is a demonstration that not only the Gospels, but the whole New Testament, hath continued the same since *Anastasi*'s time as before, and suffered no such Alteration as is pretended.

THE same appears from the entire Commentaries and Versions which were made of the New Testament before *Anastasi*'s time, all which agree with the present Copies; so that 'tis impossible there should have been any such Forgery, unless all these Writings were alter'd too, and made over anew: A supposition so wild and extravagant, that I believe no *Free-Thinker* will maintain it.

Lastly,

Lastly, IT plainly appears from the S E R M.
Gospels, as they stand at present, that they IV.
have never been thus practis'd upon : So
that whether the Design of *Anastafius* took
effect or not ; and whether any thing was
done in pursuance of it, matters nothing,
since the Gospels now in our hands shew
no signs of any such correction or emen-
dation. They do not appear like a Book
mended and polish'd by a Scholar : The
Style is plain and simple, and unaffected :
There is no Rhetorick or Flourish in it ;
none of the artful Rules of Writing or
Speaking ; but, on the contrary, the whole
Narration is carry'd on in the most com-
mon and vulgar Expressions.

THIS is so notorious, that 'tis made an
objection against the Divine Authority of
the Scriptures, especially of the Gospels,
that they are written in a Style and way
of Expression so common and familiar, so
very mean, and low and vulgar, that they
seem unworthy of the Majesty of such a
Speaker as God, and that no Scholar or
polite Writer would chuse to express
himself after such a plain and simple
manner. This Objection has been fully
answer'd by others, and the weakness of
it

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it sufficiently expos'd, so that 'tis needless to make any Reply to it in this place. All that I shall at present observe, is this, that such a neglect of the nice Rules of Art, and of every thing that looks like Cunning and Contrivance, Study and Design, as appears in the History of the Gospels, is a considerable advantage on the side of Writers who profess only to deliver plain Matters of Fact, and to relate what was done and said by our Saviour. This makes greatly for the Credit and Authority of the Gospels, and ought to confirm our belief of the Truth of those things which are reported in them.

AND thus I have fully consider'd, and I hope, confuted, this pretended Alteration of the Gospels under *Anastasius*, for which there is nothing alledg'd but this single passage of *Victor*, in a little inconsiderable *Chronicon* which he wrote, and which is all that we have of that Author's.

BEFORE I dismiss this Head, I shall produce a parallel Instance to shew the folly and absurdity of building on such a Hypothesis as this, upon the Authority of a single and obscure Writer.

Hardw

Hardwin the Jesuite, who is a much more considerable Author than *Victor* appears to have been, tells us, (a) that there was a certain Person (by which he seems to mean himself) who indulg'd his fancy perhaps a little too much, but was very shrew'd and sagacious at making Conjectures; that had made this remarkable discovery: — That there was a certain Club of Men, living I know not how many Ages ago, who undertook to dress up the Ancient History as we now have it, when there was then none in being; That he knew very well the Time and Place where this was done; That *Tully*, *Pliny*, *Virgil's Georgicks*, *Horace's Satyrs* and *Epistles*, were a great help to those who

(a) *Afferam hoc loco non inanis quidem semper conjectoris, sed nunc tamen plus justo fortassis suspiciosi, ingenioque nimium indulgentis hominis conjecturam. Deprehendit ille, ut quidem mussitabat nuper nobiscum, cœtum certorum hominum ante sæcula nescio quot extitisse, qui Historiæ veteris concinnandæ partes suscepissent, qualem nunc habemus, cum nulla tunc extaret: sibi probe notam illorum ætatem atque consuetudinem esse: inque eam rem istis subsidio fuisse Tullium, Plinium, Maronis Georgica, Flacci Sermones & Epistolas: nam hæc ille sola senset, (quod vereor ut cuiquam suadeat) ex omni latine antiquitate sincero esset monumenta, præter inscriptiones admodum paucas, Fastosque nonnullos, &c. Joannis Hardvini Chronologiæ ex nummis antiquis restitutæ Prolusio de Nummis Herodiadum, pag. 60; Parisiis, 1793, 4to.*

SERM. were engag'd in this Work ; for these he
 IV. look'd upon to be the only genuine re-
 mains of all the Latin Antiquity : except-
 ing a very few Inscriptions, and some
*Fast*i. All the rest which are receiv'd
 for ancient Authors, he looks upon to be
 false and spurious. He tells us indeed,
 that he is afraid that he shall not per-
 swade any to be of his mind in this ;
 but he seems to be pretty positive and
 certain of it himself, as appears by his not
 contenting himself with asserting it only in
 general Terms, (as *Victor* has done in his
 Story) but by relating some particular
 Circumstances belonging to it.

Now suppose any should light upon
 this Passage some Ages hence, and should
 think it of such Authority as to over-
 throw, or at least to weaken the Credit
 of *Terence*, the *Æneids* of *Virgil*, the *Odes*
 of *Horace*, and all other Writings but
 those which *Hardwin* esteem'd genuine.
 I ask, whether there would be any force
 in this Argument ; and whether any one
 would be so foolish as to reject all these
 Writers as spurious, or at least of doubt-
 ful Authority, because this single Author
 has been so bold as to advance such an
 Opinion.

Opinion, contrary to the Sentiments of S E R M.
all the World besides. The case is the IV.
same with regard to that Passage in *Victor's*
Chronicon, and the Authority of the one
ought to weigh as much with us as the
other; that is, it ought to be of no weight
at all.

BUT this is no new Device of the
Enemies of Christianity, to charge the
Scriptures, or any part of them, with be-
ing forg'd and supposititious, when they
have no other way to overthrow their Au-
thority, and destroy the Truth and Cer-
tainty of Religion.

THUS *Porphyry*, one of the ablest, as
well as the most zealous Adversaries which
Christianity ever had, when he found
himself hard press'd with some Prophecies
in *Daniel*, as undeniable Proofs of a true
Prophetick Spirit in the Holy Writers,
answers, That indeed the pretended Pro-
phesies of *Daniel*, do very directly and de-
monstratively point at some Events which
the Christians make to be the Completion
of those Prophecies: But without doubt,
(says he) these Prophecies were ne-
ver wrote by *Daniel*, who liv'd in the
Times of King *Cyrus*, but were forg'd by
I 2 some

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IV.

some Jew who wrote in a Prophetick Air and Style, after the Times of *Alexander* and *Antiochus*. But he offers at no manner of Proof of this. He has nothing to set aside the Prophecies of *Daniel* but his own positive Assertion, that without doubt they are forg'd long after the Events which are there pretended to be foretold. Now 'tis certain that the Jews never receiv'd into the Canon of their Scripture any Book or Writing that was compos'd after the finishing of their second Temple, and after the Times of *Artaxerxes* King of *Persia*. (a) For this we have the Testimony of *Josephus*, a Writer of establish'd Credit and Authority among the Jews, and who liv'd about three hundred Years before *Porphyry*.

Which therefore of these two is it most reasonable to believe; *Josephus*, who speaks of his own certain knowledge concerning the Custom of the Jews in receiving Books into the Canon of Scripture, or *Porphyry*, who was a stranger to the Jewish Books and Records, and liv'd three hundred Years after Christ? 'Tis impossible to prove any

(a) *Contra App. lib. 1.*

Matter of Fact, if a bare positive Assertion, **SERM.**
a without doubt, or an obscure Passage out **IV.**
 of a single Author, shall be allow'd to
 balance and even to outweigh the Records
 of a Nation, and the concurrent Testi-
 mony and exprefs Authority of the best
 Historians.

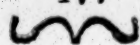
THIS is the true state of the Case, and
 all the force of such Arguments as these ;
 and whether this be *free-Thinking* and fair
 Examination ; or false Reasoning, and
 Thinking with the strongest Prejudices and
 the grossest Partiality ; I shall leave to
 any one to determine.

THERE is no reason therefore, from
 any thing which has been yet urg'd, why
 we should look upon the Gospel as a For-
 gery or *cunningly-devised Fable*, and throw
 away our Bibles as wholly useless and
 insignificant, and by no means to be
 depended upon in any thing which they
 relate.

BUT further : Tho' neither the Gos-
 pels, nor any Parts of Scripture, were
 ever thus totally alter'd and transform'd,
 yet they have, in such a long tract of
 Time, and by passing through so many
 Hands, and being often Transcrib'd, suf-
 I 3 ferd

S E R M.

IV.



fer'd very much, and been greatly impair'd and corrupted; which appears from the great difference and disagreement there is between the several Copies now extant, whether Printed, or MSS., and the vast numbers of various Readings which these afford, and which have with great diligence been collected, as far as these Copies could be procur'd, and set all together in one view. These are so many and so considerable, that it has been said, (a) that there is no Profane Author whatsoever, *cæteris paribus*, has suffer'd so much by the hand of Time, as the New Testament has done.

BUT whoever considers this Matter more closely, will find, that this is a rash and groundless assertion, and will rather incline to the contrary opinion, that no Author whatever, *cæteris paribus*, has suffer'd so little by the hand of Time as the New Testament has done.

I might argue in general from the Wisdom and Goodness of God, that the Writings of the New Testament, which contain the Doctrines of Christianity, and

(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 88.

the Articles of our Belief, are come down to us entire and uncorrupted, at least so far as concerns all fundamental or material Points, whether of Knowledge or Practice. For, supposing the Truth of the Christian Revelation, 'tis by no means credible or likely, that GOD, who was so gracious as to send his SON into the World, to make a New Revelation of his Will to Mankind, and to chuse such Persons for his Disciples and Followers as should be enabled to publish and make known this Revelation, to teach others, and transmit their Doctrine down in Writing; that what they themselves had taught, might be sufficiently known and understood after they were dead; should permit these Writings to be altered and corrupted in any essential Points, in any thing wherein his Honour and the Salvation of Men were concern'd; This, I say, is inconsistent with the Wisdom and Goodness of GOD, and what cannot enter into any Man's Heart to conceive.

THIS general Argument ought to satisfy any reasonable Person, that whatever Alterations these Writings may have undergone, our present Copies do not

I 4

differ

SERM. differ from the Originals in any material
 IV. Points, and that the Alterations and Various Readings, how many soever they be, are none of them such as subvert the True Religion, and defeat the main Design of these Writings, which was to convey down the True Religion to us.

THE Compilers of these Writings, as has been already observ'd, if the Gospel be a true History of Matters of Fact, were divine Persons, endu'd with miraculous and extraordinary Gifts, or directed and assisted by such : And tho' there is no occasion to suppose every Thought and Word inspir'd, and that they were miraculously preserv'd from every little slip and inaccuracy in what they wrote ; yet 'tis very reasonable to suppose that they were so far guided and assisted, as to be hinder'd from falling into any gross Errors and material Mistakes ; that they were kept from omitting any necessary Point which our Saviour taught, and from adding any thing as necessary which He did not make so : and that they did not pervert or misrepresent his Meaning ; but deliver'd it, in their Writings to all the main Intents and Purposes of it the same which He Himself did teach.

IN like manner, tho' there be no occasion to suppose that God should work a Miracle, to preserve their Writings free from all manner of Change and Alteration, so as to convey them down to us just such in every Particular as they were at the Beginning when they were first wrote ; yet I think we may reasonably suppose, that if (a) a particular Providence over them was necessary to preserve them from suffering any change or corruption in any material Points, they have been providentially so preserv'd ; and that they stand, even to this very hour, perfectly clear of all such, and were exempted from many of those Casualties which all other Writings have been subject to. This has been the opinion of many learned and judicious as well as pious Men (b) ; and it will be difficult to shew that there is any thing

(a) *Ita tamen invigilavit Providentia divina Ecclesiæque diligentia, ut in iis quæ ad salutem necessaria sunt, & ad fidem, & mores spectant, omnia pura & integra sint. Prolegom. 6. ad Bibl. Polygl. sect. 16.*

(b) *Repugnaret providentiæ divinæ, ut libros quos ad salutem generis humani exarari voluit ad hominibus δεότρον & σοις, quosque permanere voluit ad finem mundi ; ex quibus, ut fontibus, aquas salutes omnes gentes haurirent ; ita falsari sinerēt, ut ad hunc finem inepti essent. Non ita unquam*

SERM. thing absurd or unreasonable in this sup-
 IV. position. And if, supposing still the Truth
 of the Christian Revelation, this be ad-
 mitted, which cannot be pleaded in behalf
 of any other Writings, it will follow, that
 the Scriptures have suffer'd less from the
 hand of Time than they.

BUT let us, for the present, put the
 Scriptures upon the same common foot
 with other Writings, and I doubt not but
 it will appear, that they are not only as
 free from corruptions, but, *cæteris paribus*,
 much freer; and that our present Copies
 differ less from the Originals, than the
 Copies of any other Books of the same
 Antiquity do from theirs.

*unquam indormiuit custos Israël, qui in necessariis ecclesiæ
 suæ nunquam deficit: Cumque novæ revelationes non
 expectandæ, eo quod Deus totam voluntatem suam de doctrina
 salutis libris Scripturæ consignaverit; injuriosum esset Dei
 Providentiæ, qui se Ecclesiæ semper ad futurum promissi
 asserere, libros, in quibus hæc doctrina continetur, peritura
 aliquando, vel corruptos fore. Prolegom. 7. ad Bibl. Polygl.
 sect. 5.*

*Vide Præfat. ad Bibl. Polyglott. pag. 1. Et si autem
 librorum sacrorum conservatione Ecclesiæ operâ usus sit Deus
 tamen speciali providentiâ ita eis invigilavit, ut, &c.*

*Serio responso haud digni sunt, qui aut variasse olim
 quibusdam libros, aut ex ils minus emendatos cum curâ regi-
 stos negant.*

*Satis sit ejusmodi varietates eas esse, ut vel quæ necesse
 sario credendæ sunt, non evertant, vel quæ non credendæ
 non doceant. Heinsius Proleg. in Nov. Test.*

THE Argument which is brought to S E R M.
 prove the Spuriousness, or at least the IV.
 Uncertainty of our present Bibles, and
 the little stress which is to be laid upon
 them, is this ; — That all Copies what-
 ever differ more or less from one another ;
 and that the Various Readings collected
 out of those which have been collated,
 amount to above thirty thousand : and by
 consequence, if all the Copies now extant
 could possibly be got together and collated,
 as a great many of them have been, the
 various Readings would be encreas'd to a
 much greater number.

ALL these various Readings are falsely
 represented as so many corruptions of the
 Original Text ; and they that have col-
 lected them are said to own, and to labour
 to prove, the Text of Scripture preca-
 rious (a).

Now in vindication of the Purity and
 Authority of the Scriptures, and of the
 Labours of those who have collected these
 various Readings, there are several things
 to be consider'd.

(a) Porro omnino, ut supra monui, differentiam faciendam
 censet inter corruptionem & variam lectionem, &c. Bux-
 torf. Vindic. Text. Hebr. part. 1. cap. 4. pag. 112.

First,

SERM.

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First, THAT since the *Αὐτογέγραφα* or Originals have been lost, which, without a Miracle, must necessarily have been the Case; the real Text it self of the Sacred Writings, strictly speaking, does not lie in any single Copy whatever, but is dispersed in them all, and cannot now be retriev'd in every little particular, but by carefully consulting and collating them all: tho' there is no Copy of the Scriptures now extant, no, not the worst and most faulty that can be pitch'd upon but what is tolerably exact, and not so far corrupted, as to render that particular Copy of Scripture incapable of answering the great End and Purpose for which all Scripture was given by Inspiration of God.

Secondly, THESE Various Readings were, in the nature of the Thing impossible to be avoided, being the necessary Consequence of taking Transcripts from the first Originals, and afterwards from those Transcripts, and so on. For without a Miracle, 'tis next to impossible but that in Transcribing a long Discourse, some Oversights and small Errors should escape the most accurate Pen. And

if we consider how impatient Men were of having these Copies, and with what haste they were often taken, there would, notwithstanding all the Care and Fidelity of the Transcribers, some few Mistakes be committed, some small deviations from the Originals, or the Copies they Transcrib'd from. To this, I might add several particular Causes and Occasions of Errors and Variations in all Transcripts, and which are no other then what frequently happen in taking Copies of other Books (a).

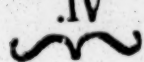
'Tis probable indeed that those Copies which were to be lodg'd in particular Churches, while the Originals themselves were in being, were carefully collated and compar'd with the Originals, and agreed as exactly with the Originals as it was possible for Human Care and Industry to make them; but then these Copies had the same fate with the Originals, and in tract of Time were lost, and supply'd by other Copies less perfect than they.

(a) Vide *Canones Critic. prefix. Testamento Westeni.* Amst. Odami, 1711. 8vo.

Thirdly,

S E R M.

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Thirdly, HENCE it appears how falsely they are charg'd with corrupting the Text, who have labour'd in collecting these Various Readings (a). For that which in strictness of speech can only be call'd the real Text itself, has long since been lost, and is therefore incapable of any corruption now. And as to the Various Readings of the several Copies, they existed in those Copies before they were thus brought together, and exhibited all at once to our view. They were not coin'd, but only collected, by those who have labour'd in this Work; and therefore they have not corrupted either Originals or Copies, nor perverted the Text, nor done any disservice to Religion.

THE Various Readings were all of them actually in being before they were thus collected; and if Religion was then True, if Christianity was founded upon

(a) *Nec est quod quenquam turbet ea codicum lectionumque varietas, quasi nihil certi haberet fides Christiana cui inniteretur, nihil enim deprehendo quod fidei substantiam laderet.*

Tantum abest ut Erasmus, Camerarium, Beza, viri pietate & eruditione conspicuos, culpae audeam, quod in suis ad sacros libros notis varias lectiones observarint, contra eos utilem operam navasse credam. Lud. de Dico Præf. in Animadvers. in Evangel.

Divine Revelation, and the Scriptures of S E R M.
 the New Testament contain'd the Truths .IV
 of the Christian Religion ; Religion is still
 True, and the Scriptures contain those
 Truths, now these Various Readings are
 collected. For Truth is immutable, and
 always consistent with itself ; and no one
 Truth whatever can be prejudic'd by the
 knowledge of any other Truth. Truth
 can never hurt any good Cause, but the
 more Truth we know, the more will
 any good Cause be promoted by it.

Fourthly, SINCE the Originals of the
 Scriptures are lost, and we have only
 Copies of them now remaining, the more
 Copies we have, the more likely shall we
 be of arriving at the very Words and
 Expressions of the True Original Text :
 But the more Copies we have, the more
 will the Various Readings of course be
 multiply'd, no one Copy agreeing in all
 Points with another.

IF (as the Case is stated by one who
 must be allow'd to be the best Judge of
 this Matter that any Age has ever pro-
 duc'd) (a) If there had been but one Ma-

(a) *Philelutherus Lipsiensis* in his Remarks upon the
 Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 64.

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manuscript of the *Greek*, at the Restoration of Learning about two Centuries ago; then we had had no Various Readings at all. And would the Text be in a better Condition *then*, than *now* we have thirty Thousand? So far from that; that in the best single Copy extant we should have had hundreds of Faults, and some Omissions irreparable. Besides that, the suspicions of Fraud and foul Play would have been increased immensely.

It is good therefore, you'll allow, to have more Anchors than one; and another MS. to join with the first, would give more Authority, as well as Security. Now chuse that second where you will, there shall be a thousand Variations from the first; and yet half or more of the Faults shall still remain in them both.

A third therefore, and so a fourth, and still on, are desirable; that, by a joint and mutual Help, all the Faults may be mended: Some Copy preserving the true Reading in one place, and some in another. And yet the more Copies you call to assistance, the more do the Various Readings multiply upon you: Every Copy having its peculiar Slips, tho' in a principal

are GENUINE.

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cipal Passage or two it do singular service. **S E R M.**
And this is Fact, not only in the New **IV.**
Testament, but in all ancient Books what-
ever. And therefore,

Fifthly, THE Various Readings are so far from disturbing the Text, as is pretended, and rendring the sense of the Place, to which they belong, uncertain, that they often help to fix the true reading, and to explain the meaning of difficult Passages. They many times give great light to dark and obscure places, and are of mighty service in clearing up the Truth, and settling Points that are in dispute. So that every Copy we can get, tho' there may be many Errors and Faults in it, yet in some passages it may be of singular use, and contribute to the restoring the Text, and bringing it nearer to the true Words of the Author.

THIS is evidently the Case in all ancient Authors; where a great number of different Copies, and consequently of various Readings, are so far from being look'd upon to be prejudicial, that, on the contrary, they have been always esteem'd to be of great advantage, and a mighty help to those who undertake to set forth a correct

K

Edition

SERM.

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Edition of any of these Books; and therefore they always make it their first Business to procure as many Copies as they can of the Book which they design to publish, as the most probable Means of succeeding in their Undertaking.

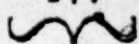
AND, as the Writer just now cited further observes, the true Reason why some of the ancient Authors, notwithstanding all the pains bestow'd upon them, remain still so corrupt and full of Errors, is the want of a sufficient number of Copies, to correct the Faults and restore the true Reading. For where the Copies of any Author are numerous, tho' the various Readings always encrease in proportion; there the Text, by an accurate collation of them, made by skilful and judicious Hands, is ever the more correct, and comes nearer to the true words of the Author.

THIS is exactly the Case of the New Testament, which is in a much better condition than any other ancient Book, upon account of the great number of Copies which are still extant, and the Various Readings thence arising. And if all these Copies could be got together, and were accurately collated, as many of them

them have lately been, by skilful and judicious Hands, we should come still nearer to the true Original Words of each Writer, and might possibly bring up our present Bibles almost to an equality with the Originals themselves.

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WE see then, that, as the Case now stands with the Scriptures, and since the Originals are long since lost and irrecoverably perish'd; what is complain'd of as such a grievance and a prejudice, is rather a great Benefit and Advantage.

Sixthly, THE Learned Writer already referr'd to, and whose Skill and Knowledge in this Argument, is unquestionable, assures us, that, to his own knowledge, there are other ancient Authors whose Various Readings, do, in proportion, far exceed those of the New Testament, tho' they have not been noted with that Religious Exactness which is us'd in viewing the Sacred Writings. To which, I believe, we may truly add, that there have been many more Copies and Translations of the New Testament, than of any other Book whatever; which must necessarily encrease the number of Various Readings: And then I think it will follow, that the

SERM. New Testament has suffer'd less from the
 IV. hand of Time, than any other Book.

Seventhly, THE great number of Copies of the Books of the New Testament, by which the Various Readings have been occasion'd, has this further advantage, that by this means the Scriptures, which are the Pillars and Supporters of Christian Liberty, have been preserv'd entire, without being either abolish'd or corrupted. For considering the numerous multitude of Copies dispers'd through all Places, translated into almost all Languages, and guarded with all solicitous Care and Industry; any attempt of this kind had been an impossible Undertaking.

No such design against the Scriptures, whether to destroy them wholly, or to corrupt their Truth and Purity, could be carry'd on, without all Mens agreeing to give up their Bibles at once to be destroyed, or meeting all together to make the same Alterations in them. But we know with what a watchful Eye, with what Care and Faithfulness the Primitive Christians kept the Scriptures, and that they chose rather to part with their Lives than become *Traditores*, and deliver up their

their Bibles to be burnt. Nor can we suppose the Christians themselves, who were already perswaded of the Truth of the Scriptures, to be so weak as to think they could serve their Cause, by making any Alterations in them. They knew their Cause to be good in it self, and that it did not want to be supported by any fraudulent and deceitful Practices. And had it wanted it never so much, they could never have attempted it with any probability of Success. For besides that 'tis next to impossible to suppose that they should all agree to this, and meet together for this purpose, without which the Business could never have been done; the Jews and other Enemies of the Christians, who had these Scriptures in their hands, were as watchful upon the Christians, as the Christians were upon them, and would soon have detected and expos'd their Design.

WHEREAS had there been but some few single Copies of these Books lodg'd in some private Hands; this indeed would have made room for Fraud and Foul Play, and given just Suspicions of something of that kind. But as long as the Copies

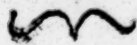
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were very numerous and dispers'd through all Hands; they were a grand Fence and Security to the Sacred Text, and made all attempts of this Nature impossible. The Enemies of Christianity could not corrupt the Scriptures themselves, nor charge the Friends of Christianity with any such thing. They had both of them a watchful Eye upon each other; and whoever did this, was sure to be quickly discover'd, and complain'd of. And so in Fact it happen'd; for when some few Heriticks were so silly as to falsify the Text in favour of their Heresies, they were immediately detected, and expos'd for so doing.

Eighthly, AFTER all that can be said about these Various Readings, it must be own'd that this is rather Matter of Curiosity, than real Use; tho' it is a very commendable Curiosity. For amongst all these Various Readings which we now have, how very few make any considerable alteration in the Sense of the Places to which they belong? 'Tis, for the most part, indifferent which Reading you follow: The propriety of Speech, strictness of Grammar, beauty and niceness of Construction, and such like, are sometimes better consulted

by following one Reading before another; but the main Sense and Scope of the Place, is, generally speaking, the same. And among those few places where the Various Readings do really alter the Sense, there are fewer still where the Sense is alter'd in any point of Difficulty and Importance. And whenever there are any such, we may have recourse to other places of Scripture, where the same Points are stated with more Clearness and Certainty.

FOR the seeds of our Faith are not so sparingly sown in the several Books of Scripture, as that the loss, or invalidity of one or two of those Books, much less of some few single Passages of any Book, should supplant our Belief. The Wisdom and Goodness of GOD have so order'd the Scriptures, that Matters of great Moment, whether of Belief or Practice, should not be amongst the ἀπαξ λεγόμενα, once only set down, and that in one single Book, but often repeated, and that in several Books of Scripture. So that if any one single Passage of a Book should be corrupted beyond retrieve, or a whole Book entirely lost, yet there is nothing of Moment in that Place, or in that

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Book, but what we shall meet with in other Places, and in other Books of Scripture, where the Reading is unquestionable, and the Sense plainly deliver'd. So that, as I said before, take any one single Copy, and it contains all the great and essential Truths of Christianity; which if a Man believe and comply with, he is certainly a Christian, and will not lose the Reward of such.

UPON the Whole therefore, we may justly conclude, that the Original Texts are not corrupted either by Jews, Christians, or others; that they are of supreme Authority in all Matters of Faith and Practice; that the Copies we now have, are in the main, and in all necessary Points, true Transcripts of the first *Αὐτόγεγραφα* written by the sacred Penmen; that besides the special Providence of God, there are other Means whereby these Books have been preserv'd pure and uncorrupt, against all the attempts of Sectaries, Hereticks, and others. That the Errors and Mistakes which have befallen them, by Negligence, or Inadvertency, or Ignorance of Transcribers and Printers, are seldom in Matters of any Moment; and where-ever they

are GENUINE.

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are so, may, by collation of other Copies, SERM.
and other Means, be rectify'd and amend- IV.

ed: And that we have Reason to have
still the same good Opinion of the Scrip-
tures, and to believe that they are still,
and will be to the end of the World,
capable of answering those great Purposes
for which they were first written, to make
us *wise unto salvation*, and *thoroughly fur-*
nish'd unto all good Works.

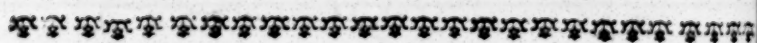


SERMON



SERMON V.

Of the *Plainness* and *Perspicuity* of the *Scriptures*; notwithstanding the many different Interpretations thereof, and the many Controversies about *Religion*.



I THESS. V. 21.

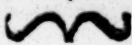
Prove all things : hold fast that which is good.

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IN my First Discourse upon these Words, I made it my Business to enquire what the Apostle means by *proving all things*; to state the True Notion of that private Judgment, or Freedom



dom of Thought, which every Man ought S E R M.  
to exercise in Religious Matters ; and to V.  
shew wherein it consists. 

THE next thing which I undertook, was, To consider what that *Free-Thinking* is, which is *Falsely so call'd*, and which some have lately taken up ; and to shew how much it differs from that in the *Text*.

AND having laid down some Rules in my *First* Discourse, necessary to be observ'd in this Business, and without which we can never Reason justly or Think freely upon any Subject ; I propos'd to Examine the present *Free-Thinking*, by those Rules.

THE *First* of them was, To possess our selves with a sincere Love of Truth, for its own sake. Whether we thus love Truth, will appear by our entertaining Propositions with greater or less degrees of Assurance than the Proofs they are built upon will warrant.

AND this leads me to examine the Principal Arguments urged by *Free-Thinking* against Religion, which have been the Subject of some of the former Discourses ; in the last of which, I more particularly consider'd what they have advanc'd, in order

SERM. order to weaken and overthrow the Credit and Authority of the Scriptures in general, and especially the Books of the New Testament; and endeavour'd to shew both the weakness and falseness of what they have urg'd to this purpose.

UPON the Whole therefore, and notwithstanding any thing which has been yet objected by *Free-Thinkers*, we have no reason to alter our Opinion of the Scriptures, but may justly believe them to be the *Genuine Word of God*; and that they are come down to us pure and uncorrupted, as to all the great Ends and Purposes for which they were first written.

BUT what does this signify, that we have the True Scriptures, which contain all necessary Instructions in the way to Eternal Life; since, as the Woman of *Samarita* said to our Saviour, *John* iv. 11. *Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: whence then hast thou that living water?* So the *Free-Thinkers* tell us, that the sense and meaning of the sacred Books lies very deep; that the Scriptures are dark and obscure, and that we are destitute of sufficient Means to understand them.

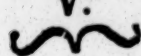
The Priests, say they, (a) differ about SERM.  
V.  
the sense and meaning of those Books they receive as sacred. This is evident from the great number of Sects in each Religion, founded on the diversity of Senses put on their several Scriptures. And tho' the Books of the Old and New Testament, are the immediate Dictates of God Himself, and all other Scriptures are the Books of Impostors, yet are the Priests of the Christian Church (like the Priests of all other Churches) not only divided into numberless Sects, on account of their different Interpretations of them, but even the Priests of the same Sect differ endlessly in Opinion about their Sense and Meaning. And, This, they say, makes the Argument the stronger for the Duty and Necessity of Free-Thinking.

THIS indeed is a good reason why every Man should search and study the Scriptures with great Care and Industry, and judge for himself, as well as he can, about the true Sense and Meaning of them: But 'tis no Argument that there is nothing certainly declar'd or laid down for Truth in Scripture, or that 'tis im-



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possible for us to know what is so ; and therefore that we may as well discard all Scripture, *i. e.* all Reveal'd Religion, and give our selves no trouble about it, but follow our Reason, or Humour, and do what seemeth right in our own Eyes: Which is the Conclusion *Free-Thinkers* would draw from the Obscurity of Scripture, and the different Interpretations of it.

FOR Priests differ no more about the sense and meaning of Scripture, than Learned Men do about the sense and meaning of other Ancient Writings ; witness the great number of Comments which have been wrote upon all the old Authors, and the different Interpretations which different Commentators have given us of the same Passages. But was it ever thought a good Reason why we should lay aside the study of all Antiquity, and despair of ever understanding these Books, because they who have made it their Business to study these Books, and explain them to others, have differ'd very much in their Explications of them. On the contrary, these Explications have been always thought good Helps towards the

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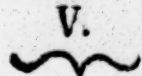
understanding ancient Authors: The more S E R M.  
 Comments we have upon these ancient V.  
 Books, the more able shall we be to un-  
 derstand them, every Commentator bring-  
 ing in some new light, and hitting upon  
 something which others have miss'd: And  
 yet at the same time there will be  
 a greater variety of Opinions, and so many  
 the more different Interpretations.

THE Case is the same with respect to  
 the Scriptures, which as they have been  
 deservedly more Study'd and more Com-  
 mented upon, than any other Books; so  
 there have been a greater variety of In-  
 terpretations put upon several Passages in  
 them. But the Scriptures are not, for this  
 reason the more difficult, but the more  
 easy to be understood; and I believe we  
 are furnish'd with better Means and Helps  
 for the understanding them, than we are  
 for the understanding any other Books.  
 Several excellent Treatises have been writ-  
 ten upon this Subject, containing general  
 Rules and Directions for the Interpreta-  
 tion of Scripture; besides numberless use-  
 ful Commentaries upon each particular  
 Book; many of which are adapted to the  
 meanest Capacities.

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THE Scriptures, in the main, are to be interpreted and explain'd by the same Rules which we observe in reading and studying other Books. Some of these have already been mention'd ; such as the Original Languages wherein the Scriptures were wrote ; the Idioms thereof, and of that particular Writer whose Meaning we are to enquire into ; the Manners and Customs of the People to whom the Speech or Writing is directed ; the particular Opinions and Perswasions which prevail'd at that time ; the then State and Posture of Affairs : to which it were easy to add many more were it necessary. Thus far the Scriptures stand upon the same bottom with other Writings ; and whatever Argument or Reason can be urg'd to dissuade us from attempting to read and understand the Scriptures, will hold as strongly against studying any ancient Authors whatever.

BUT the Scriptures have manifestly the Advantage of all other Writings in point of Plainness and Perspicuity, in that they were written by the express Direction and Appointment of GOD, for the Instruction of all Mankind in those things which



which are necessary to be known and practis'd, in order to their Eternal Salvation. This cannot be said of any other Book in the World besides the Bible, and cannot be deny'd of That. From whence we may justly conclude, that the Scriptures are sufficiently plain and intelligible in all necessary Points, to every sober, impartial, and diligent Enquirer: And that whatever is intricate and obscure, difficult and hard to be understood, is, for that reason, not necessary to Salvation.

THAT God can speak his Mind to Men as plainly as one Man can speak his Mind to another, is certain. And that he has done so in all those things which he would have all Men believe and practise, is equally certain. So that those places of Scripture which contain any necessary Truths, where God would have His Meaning certainly known, are certainly so plain and intelligible, that all Men of common Capacities, may, by the sincere and diligent Use of common Means, understand them. For it is inconsistent with the Wisdom of God to be so wanting to his own Will and End, as to speak obscurely upon those Heads, where he

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S E R M. would have his Meaning plainly known  
 V. and 'tis repugnant to his Justice to require  
 Men to know certainly his Meaning, where  
 he himself has not plainly reveal'd it.

Now, that there are a great many things in Scripture, especially the Scriptures of the New Testament, which we are now more particularly considering, so very plain that they may be understood by any ordinary Reader, is undeniable. Such are these :

T H A T God is a Spirit, a Being of Infinite Perfections, the Beginning and the End, from Everlasting to Everlasting. That He is every where Present, and exercises an universal Providence over all his Works. That nothing escapes His Knowledge or is beyond his Power. That He is Infinitely Pure and Holy, Just and True, Good and Merciful. That He is a great Friend and Patron of Piety and Virtue and an Enemy to all wicked and unreasonable Persons and Actions : A Rewarder of them that diligently seek and serve Him and a Punisher of those who obstinately offend Him.

T H A T Jesus Christ is the Son of God the Messiah and Saviour of the World

That

That by believing Him to be such, and obeying His Commands, Men are to expect and look for Salvation. That He was born after a miraculous Manner; that He was put to death, and rose again; that he ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the Right Hand of God; that he has all Power given Him in Heaven, and in Earth; that 'tis he whom God hath appointed to be the Judge of the Quick and the Dead; that all Men shall rise again at the Last Day; that they who believe and obey the Gospel shall be sav'd; and they who reject and disobey the Gospel shall be damn'd.

It were easy to enlarge upon this Head, and to produce many other Truths as plainly and expressly declar'd in Scripture as these which I have already mention'd. And then as to Matters of Sin and Duty, nothing can be more clearly set forth than these. The Scriptures were originally design'd to be profitable for Doctrine, and Instruction in Righteousness: To be an infallible Rule of Life and Manners, and, as such, they must be both perfect and plain. They must contain all necessary Truths, and express these Truths so clear-



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SERM. ly, that Men of ordinary Capacities, by  
 V. their own Diligence and Care, in conjunction with those other Helps and Advantages which are in their Power, may come to the knowledge of them.

IT must be granted, that there are many obscure and difficult Passages in the Sacred Writings, especially in the Prophetical and Controversial Parts; on purpose, perhaps to exercise the Study and Enquiries of those who have leisure and capacity. And if it be said that those Places contain any necessary Truths, which I cannot conceive, because whatever is necessary, must by reason of that very necessity, be plain and intelligible; all that is necessary for us to believe of such Places, is this, that That Sense of them, whatever that be which was intended by God, is True. For he that doth not believe this, calls God's Truth into question. But to believe that or that particular Sense to be the true Sense of them, or to believe the true Sense, and avoid the false, cannot be necessary either to Faith, or Salvation. The Sum is this:

WE may argue, from the Wisdom and Goodness of God, as well as from the

End and Design of the Scriptures, that SERM.  
V.  
all necessary Points which God requires us explicitly to believe, are propounded to us with sufficient Plainness, so that all may understand them: That all things necessary to Faith and a good Life, are so clearly deliver'd, that any sober and inquisitive Person may learn them; and none can be ignorant of them, but through their own fault.

If, therefore, *the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this World hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine unto them,* 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. The Gospel carries so much Light with it, in all things necessary to make Men true Christians, that it cannot be hid but to such whose Eyes are blinded by the Devil and their Lusts. If any Man be an Infidel, or ignorant of the True Religion; it is not the fault of the Gospel, or of his Understanding, but of his Will.

OUR Saviour tells us, *that for Judgment he came into this World:* John ix. 39. i.e. for the discrimination or distinction

SERM. of Men, and manifesting the just Judgment  
 V. of God upon them. *That they which see not, might see; that they which are blind and ignorant, and sensible of their being so, might receive Light and Instruction. And that they which see, might be made blind.* That they who think they see and know enough already, and so refuse any further Instruction, might have that Light taken from them, and be kept in Darkness.

IF Men come to the study of the Scriptures with a sincere desire to know the Truth, and a firm Resolution to be guided by it, and to practise whatsoever they shall find to be their Duty, whether it be for or against their worldly Interest: If they would divest themselves of all Prejudice and Partiality, all corrupt Passions and Affections; and bring along with them honest Minds and teachable Dispositions, God would never leave them destitute of Means sufficient for the understanding all things necessary to Salvation, or suffer them to fall into any fundamental Mistakes, and finally to miscarry.

*If any Man will do his Will, says our Saviour, he shall know of the Doctrine, when*



ther it be of God, or whether I speak of SERM.  
V.  
my self, John vii. 17. And again, chap.  
viii. 31, 32. If ye continue in my Word,  
then are ye my Disciples indeed, and ye shall  
know the Truth: With many more pro-  
mises to the same purpose.

To which we may add, That in the  
plain reason of Things, such Men are  
best qualify'd for reading the Scriptures.  
For the Scriptures were chiefly design'd  
to influence Mens Hearts and Affections,  
and reform their Morals; and therefore  
such Moral Qualifications as I have men-  
tion'd, are chiefly necessary to prepare  
Men for a right understanding of them.  
The Truths therein contain'd have no  
Enemies but our Lusts and Vices: And  
Men never disbelieve the Scriptures, or  
are prejudic'd against any of the Con-  
tents of that Book, but by those Sins,  
and unlawful Pleasures which that Book  
condemns. These are the greatest Impe-  
diments and Hindrances to the Under-  
standing; they press down the Soul, and  
weigh down the Mind, and keep our  
rational Faculties from exerting their full  
force and strength. They darken that  
Light within us, which the Wise Man  
L 4 calls

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SERM. calls *the candle of the Lord*; they cast  
 V. a Mist before our Eyes, and make those  
 things appear cloudy and obscure, which  
 in themselves are very bright and clear.  
 Remove but these out of the way, and we  
 shall soon discover and see the Truth.  
 The Truth will then lie so plain and  
 obvious before us, that we shall meet with  
 no difficulty in the search of it; and be  
 so natural and agreeable to us, that our  
 Minds, without making the least resist-  
 ance, will gladly open to receive it, as  
 their proper Food and Nourishment.

If we resolve to make the Scriptures  
 the Rule of our Life, as well as of our  
 Faith, and read them with a full pur-  
 pose to *hearken to, and do all that the*  
*Lord our God shall there say to us*: If  
 we be conversant in the Scriptures, and  
 make them our constant study, with this  
 View: we shall daily gain ground; the  
 Difficulties will lessen upon our hands; we  
 shall be let still further and further into  
 the Meaning of them: And tho' there  
 will remain many things hard to be un-  
 derstood, and which perhaps we shall ne-  
 ver fully understand, yet we shall not fail  
 of understanding so much as will *make*  
*us wise unto Salvation.* But

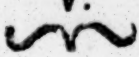
BUT if Men come to read the Scrip- SERM.  
tures with any wrong byas upon their V.  
Minds, with corrupt Passions and vicious  
Inclinations, with strong Prejudices and  
Aversions against the Truth; they will  
neither be diligent in searching for the  
Truth, nor likely to find it, when they  
search for it; nor willing to receive it,  
when they have found it. Those things  
which are plain and evident to others,  
will be dark and obscure to them; and  
while they have another interest on foot  
different from the Truth, either their  
Eyes will be blinded that they cannot  
see what lies directly before them, or  
else they will *handle the Word of God*  
*deceitfully*, wrest and pervert the plain  
meaning of the Text, and force the words,  
contrary to their most obvious significa-  
tion, into the service of that Cause which  
they have already espous'd, and are re-  
solv'd to maintain.

BESIDES which, there is often-times  
something Judicial in this Matter: Where  
Men do not study God's Word, in order  
to practise it, but to practise upon it:  
where they read the Scriptures, not to  
find the Meaning of the Holy Spirit, but  
the



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the deprav'd Sense of their own Minds; and instead of admiring the Beauty and Majesty of the Sacred Writings, and observing the Evidences of their Truth and Divine Original, they industriously set themselves to find, or rather to make Faults and Flaws, to raise groundless Objections, and *perverse Disputings*, to overthrow the Authority of Scripture, and bring the Sacred Books down, not only to a level with, but even below all human Writings: I say, when Men study the Scriptures with such wicked Views and Designs, God does often interpose, and not only suffer such Persons to fall by their own Devices, and be ensnar'd and *taken in their own craftiness*; but does moreover smite them with a Judicial *blindness and hardness of heart*; so that notwithstanding all their boasted Learning and discerning Judgment, they mistake the plainest Matters, commit the grossest Blunders, and lose themselves where *a way-faring Man, tho' a Fool, does never err*.

WHETHER the *Free-Thinkers* study the Scriptures with these ill Designs, they themselves best know: But there seems to be something of Infatuation in those

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gross Abuses or Mistakes they have committed, in interpreting and applying Scripture, which I shall take more particular notice of in its proper Place. SERM.  
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To close this Point: Notwithstanding all the Difficulties there are in the Bible, of which no doubt there are great numbers, there are a hundred plain Texts to one that is obscure; and all things either useful or necessary to Salvation, are therein most clearly deliver'd, and may easily be understood by every one who is willing and desirous to learn. So that nothing can be more ridiculous than to make all Arts and Sciences requisite towards understanding the Bible (a). This may as truly be said of any other ancient Author as the Bible; the Difficulties of which, are much of the same nature with those of other Books, and to be overcome the same way: And yet there are many ancient Writers which the *Free-Thinkers* imagine themselves tolerable Masters of, tho' they will find it difficult to give the World a Proof of their understanding all

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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 10, 11, 12.

156 *Of the Plainness and Perspicuity*

SERM. Arts and Sciences, and every conceivable  
 V. part of Knowledge.

AND so most certainly Men may understand the Bible tolerably well, at least so far as will answer the main Purpose and Design for which the Bible was written, without being deeply skill'd in all Arts and Sciences. If this were not the Case, none could be good Men, or good Christians, but great Scholars: Whereas all the necessary and fundamental Truths of Religion are of such a nature as requires rather purity of Heart, than quickness of Apprehension or depth of Learning to understand them. Nor do I remember that our Saviour any-where requires extraordinary Parts, or great Reading, as necessary Qualifications for understanding his Doctrine, and becoming his Disciples. On the contrary, 'tis very evident, that Christianity was not designed only, nor chiefly for such, but also and equally for Men of ordinary Understandings and vulgar Capacities; and therefore there is nothing necessary in Christianity, but what may as well be understood by the one as the other. *St. Paul* tells us, that God has render'd all the Learning



and Wisdom of this World, foolish, in comparison with the Wisdom of the Gospel, and unable to withstand the Force and Evidence of it. *Where is the wise? Where is the disputer of this World? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this World?* 1 Cor. xix.

I grant, that, as Matters now stand in the World, 'tis necessary that the Publick Teachers and Preachers of Christianity, should be competently skill'd in Human Learning, in order to defend the Truth and Purity of their Religion, against those who use so much Art and Cunning to corrupt and oppose it: But this is a consequential Necessity, and does not directly and immediately follow from the inherent difficulty there is in the Contents of the Bible, which, in the main, and in all necessary Points, lie level to the common Capacities of Mankind.

BUT if the Scriptures be thus plain and intelligible, how comes it to pass that the World is so full of Controversies about Religious Matters, and that there are so many different Opinions so hotly maintain'd?

THIS

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SERM. THIS is the next Objection which is  
 V. made by the *Free-Thinkers*, (a) That the  
*Priests of the Christian Church* (like the  
*Priests of all other Churches*) are not only  
 divided into numberless *Seets*, on account  
 of their different *Interpretations of Scrip-  
 ture*, but even the *Priests of the same Seet*  
 differ endlessly in *Opinion about their Sense  
 and Meaning*. To confirm which, we are  
 presented with a formal *List or Catalogue*  
 of material *Points* about which there  
 have been, and, it seems, still are, great  
*Contests and Disputes*.

BUT is not all this easily accounted for,  
 from the *Nature of Things*? And is not  
 the *Case* plainly the same in other *Mat-  
 ters* as it is in *Religion*? There is scarce  
 any thing about which there have not  
 been variety of *Opinions*, and wherein  
*Men* have not either thought differently,  
 or at least express'd themselves so. This  
 is evident in other *Professions* as well  
 as *Divinity*. It were easy to multiply *In-  
 stances* of this *Nature* in *Law* and *Phy-  
 sick*, and even the more common and or-  
 dinary *Affairs of Life*. But this way never

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(a) *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, pag. 56.

esteem'd an Argument, that there was no-  
 thing which could certainly be depended  
 upon in these Matters; and therefore that  
 Men should never attempt to recover their  
 Right, or their Health, or endeavour to  
 raise themselves and improve their For-  
 tunes, but should sit still contented with  
 their present Condition, whatever it be.

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ON the contrary, notwithstanding the  
 great variety of Opinions there are to be  
 found amongst Men in every Study and  
 Profession, every Art and Science, there  
 are many things which All are agreed in,  
 which are founded upon such undeniable  
 Evidence, that they have never been  
 question'd but by weak and foolish, or  
 wicked and designing Men. And so it is  
 in Religion, where, tho' there be many  
 Contests and Disputes, yet at the same  
 time there are many Things, and those  
 the most material, which have never been  
 question'd, but by those who have either  
 weak Heads or wicked Hearts.

RELIGION, however, has manifestly  
 the advantage in this respect above all  
 other parts of Knowledge; since we have  
 a more certain way of ending all Contro-  
 versies in Religion necessary to be ended,  
 than



SERM. *V.* than we have of ending Controversies about any other Subject: I say, all Controversies necessities to be ended; for as to those that are not so, they will end when the World ends, and that is time enough. The Scriptures are abundantly sufficient for this Purpose, as appears from what has been already said, if Men would come to the reading of them with honest and upright Hearts, without any prejudice and prepossession, and humbly beg the guidance and assistance of that Holy Spirit by whose Inspiration they were written.

BUT let us enquire a little more particularly what these Controversies are, and how they affect the Truth of Religion. And this is so much the more necessary, because these Controversies are very much magnify'd and misrepresented; and the Priests are charg'd (and indeed, in the heat of Disputes, some of them have been so weak as to charge one another) with differing even about the Fundamentals of Religion: Which Charge, from whatever quarter it comes, is very unjust. There are many Things about which there have been no Disputes amongst wise and good Men: such are those Truths which have

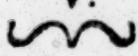
been already mention'd as so plainly laid down in Scripture, that they cannot escape the observation of any ordinary Reader.

SERM.  
V.  


And if the *Free-Thinkers* are for calling the Truth of those Propositions in question, and would doubt or dispute the Certainty of them : in this, I believe, they will be singular, and find none to join them, and increase *the growing Sect*. All who believe a divine Revelation, and acknowledge the Authority of Scripture, must assent to those Truths as plainly reveal'd : And if any such deny them, they are not only in an Error, but their Error is certainly their Crime. It proceeds not from any defect of Understanding, but from the fault of their Will ; from corrupt Passions, and partial Affections, and is to be reckon'd amongst the *works of the flesh*.

BUT concerning these Religious Disputes, there are several things to be observ'd.

First, THERE being no more Disputes about Religion, than there are about other Subjects, they can affect Religion no more than they do other Subjects. There have been Disputes about the common Principles

SERM. V.  ciples of all Knowledge ; but these Disputes can never make those Principles uncertain, or justify that universal Scepticism which some would introduce into the World upon the foot of these Disputes. For all Disputes naturally suppose some Truths which are to be clear'd up, and other indisputable ones by which the disputed ones may be clear'd. Without this, all Disputes, all Discourse, Reasoning and Argument, nay, the very Power of Thought and Speech, are wholly useless and insignificant.

IN every thing that is controverted and disputed, something must be taken for granted and suppos'd to be True. Even they who contend for an absolute Uncertainty of all Things, and would give themselves up to a general Doubting and Hesitation ; cannot do this without being assur'd of some things which prove the necessity of such a general doubting, and suspending their assent. Some general Truths or Truth they must know ; this at least, *that there is nothing certain*, in order to justify their Conduct. And by the same means that they come to the knowledge of this Truth, they may come



to the knowledge of other Truths ; which is sufficient to destroy the Foundation of universal Scepticism. SERM.  
V.

Secondly, THE Disputes about Religion, are not about the general Grounds and Foundation of Religion ; and therefore do not destroy Religion itself, or render it precarious, and leave Men at liberty whether they will have any Religion or no.

THE general Principles of Religion, are the same with the Principles of Human Reason and Knowledge ; which Principles we are in secure possession of, and are thereby enabled to judge of the Truth or Falshood of any thing propos'd to us, or whether we can come to any Resolution about it, or no.

WHEN any thing is propos'd to us, which we can discern no Foundation in Reason to affirm or deny ; we may and ought to lay it by as uncertain, and leave it in doubt. But this is not the Case of the Principles and Grounds of Natural Religion ; such as, the Being and Providence of God ; the difference of Good and Evil ; the distinction of Matter and Spirit : these have been often prov'd agreeable to Reason, and not only so, but to result imme-

SERM. diately, and to follow directly from the  
 V. most evident Principles of Reason: And  
 therefore, if there be any thing at all Cer-  
 tain, these are certainly so. But,

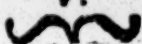
*Thirdly*, To come to Reveal'd Religion, and the Christian Revelation in particular. 'Tis to be observ'd, That the general Grounds of Christianity cannot be doubted of; because Christianity stands upon such Propositions as are the plain Principles of Reason and Natural Religion, which are already sufficiently establish'd.

THAT God can make a Revelation of his Will to Mankind: That He who gave us all the Power we have to discover those Truths which lie within the bounds of our Natural Enquiry, can inform us of others that lie out of our reach, as well as one Man can acquaint another with some Things which otherwise he could not have known, cannot reasonably be deny'd. That God should make such a Revelation, is, upon many accounts, which I shall not now mention, highly probable: And that He actually made such a Revelation to the first Professors of Christianity, we have such Evidence from the highest Principles of Historical Faith, as

puts the Matter beyond all reasonable doubt.

SERM.

V.



So that unless the Truth of the Gospel History could be disprov'd, which neither has been nor can be done, the Grounds of Christianity in general stand unmov'd, notwithstanding all the Disputes which have been rais'd about it.

*Fourthly*, THE Disputes then so much complain'd of, cannot concern the Foundation of Christianity, which remains unshaken, but must respect some particular Doctrines and render them uncertain, and upon that account unfit to be insisted upon as Doctrines of Christianity. These Doctrines are falsely said to be fundamental; and from thence it is falsely inferr'd, that there is nothing certain in Christianity.

IF we take the whole Body of the Christian Religion, as laid down, not in the Scriptures themselves, but in modern Systems of Divinity, and Human Compositions, tho' every Point of Christianity, as explain'd in those Systems, should be disputed, and prov'd to be false, Christianity will not at all suffer by such Disputes, but will still be true: For these Disputes affect



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SERM. not the Truth of the Christian Revelation,  
V. but of Human Explications thereof.

AND if this be the Case of Christianity in general, much more will it hold of any particular Doctrines of it, none of which are fundamental as they stand explain'd in modern Systems.

THE *Free-Thinkers* tell us, (a) That the most fundamental Doctrine of Christianity, is the Doctrine of the Ever-blessed TRINITY. But it remains to be proved, that this Doctrine, consider'd under any particular *Human* Explication, (especially such an absurd one as they have pick'd out) is the most fundamental, or indeed any fundamental Doctrine at all.

THE same may be said of the Doctrine of the RESURRECTION; which is not a fundamental Article under any of those Explications which have been given of it. 'Tis by no means necessary to our belief of this Article, that we should be able to determine (b) *whether, at the Resurrection, Men shall have a Body consisting of the same numerical Particles of Matter*

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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 61.

(b) Ibid. pag. 65.

that were laid in the Grave : Or, whether SERM.  
V.  
they shall have a Body consisting of the same  
numerical Particles of Matter that have  
been sometime or other vitally united to the  
Soul during the Life of the Man : Or, whe-  
ther they shall have a Body consisting of  
Particles of Matter that were never united  
to the Soul during the Life of the Man :  
Or, whether they shall not have a Body  
consisting of any Particles of Matter indif-  
ferently.

THESE are such Questions, as, which  
way soever they are determin'd, do not  
affect the main Substance of this Article of  
our Faith; the Truth of which will re-  
main unshaken, whether any of these  
Opinions be true or false. Personal Iden-  
tity, does not consist in the Soul's being  
united to the very same numerical Particles  
of Matter, or to any particular System of  
Matter exclusive of all other, but in the  
Soul it self being the same, and in an  
actual Remembrance of its own Sensations  
and Perceptions. So that, at the Refur-  
rection of the Body, and its Union with  
the Soul, if the Soul finds and knows it  
self to be the same it was before, and re-  
members the Good or Ill it has done in the

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SERM. V. Body, and is thereupon capable of being rewarded or punished accordingly; it signifies nothing what Matter the Body is compos'd of, whether it be the same with, or different from that which was united to the Soul in this Life.

THE *Free-Thinkers* tell us further, (a) *That some question whether they shall rise with any Body, or no.* Who these are, amongst those who profess Christianity, I know not. They must be those who deny Reveal'd Religion; and then it will not be difficult to guess what Sect they are of.

IT would be easy to shew, that the Observation which I have made, upon the Disputes rais'd about these two Articles, would hold true of most other Religious Disputes. From whence I infer,

*Fifthly*, THAT if all the Disputes in Religion were narrowly look'd into, and thoroughly examin'd, the greatest part of them would be found to be such as did not concern the Substance of our Faith, but might be decided either way without any detriment to it. For it is not so much

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(a) *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, pag. 65.



the Truth of the Things themselves that is S E R M.  
disputed, as the *Modus*, or Manner of V.  
them. We may be assur'd of the Truth  
of many Things which we are not able to  
account for, or explain. This is evidently  
the Case in Natural Philosophy, where  
we know nothing but Experiment and  
Matter of Fact, and are not able ultimate-  
ly to assign the true Cause of any one  
Operation in Nature, tho' we cannot  
deny that there are such Operations and  
Effects.

AND therefore our being unable to give  
a rational account of Reveal'd Truths, to  
explain, for Instance, the *Trinity*, the *In-  
carnation*, the *Resurrection of the Body*, is  
no reason why we should reject and disbe-  
lieve these Truths. Nor are the different  
Opinions of Men who have attempted the  
Explication of such difficult Points, any  
argument that the Things themselves are  
either false or uncertain. And yet all the  
Differences and Disputes in Religious Mat-  
ters so much complain'd of, and especially  
those which the *Free-Thinkers* have pro-  
duc'd, are of this kind : They are Disputes  
which do not really concern any of the  
Articles

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SERM. *V.* Articles themselves of our Christian Faith, but relate only to the different Explications which Men have given of them. And if there be any of these Disputes which seem to affect the Substance it self of our Faith, they do it by indirect and remote Consequences: Which Consequences, as they are openly disavow'd and disclaim'd by each of the contending Parties, so 'tis inconsistent with Charity to charge them upon either.

*Sixthly*, 'Tis to be further observ'd, that many of these Disputes arise from nothing else but the different ways wherein Men express themselves, from their misunderstanding one another, and mistaking the Question in dispute; and vanish as soon as each side comes to explain their full Meaning, and define the Terms which they make use of to express their Sense.

THIS one Consideration would reduce the disputed part of Religion into a much narrower compass than that which the *Free-Thinkers* represent it in; that they may make it, as we have reason to suspect of less consequence both to themselves

and others whether they profess any Religion or no. SERM.  
V.

INDEED, this Consideration is applicable to Controversies of all kinds, as well as those in Religion.

'Tis the Observation of a great Master in Controversy, (a) 'That the knowing precisely what our Words stand for, would, in many Cases, quickly end the Dispute. For (says he) I am apt to think, that Men, when they come to examine them, find their simple Ideas all generally to agree, tho' in discourse with one another, they perhaps confound one another with different Names.—I imagine, that Men who abstract their Thoughts, and do well examine the Ideas of their own Minds, cannot much differ in Thinking; however they may perplex themselves with Words, according to the way of Speaking of the several Schools or Sects they have been bred up in: Tho' amongst Unthinking Men, who examine not scrupulously and carefully their own Ideas, and strip them not of the Marks

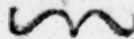
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(a) Locke's Essay, B. 2. c. 13. sect. 27.



SERM.

V.



‘ Men use for them, but confound them  
 ‘ with Words; there must be endless Dis-  
 ‘ pute, Wrangling, and Jargon, especially  
 ‘ if they be learned, bookish Men, devo-  
 ‘ ted to some Sect, and accustomed to the  
 ‘ language of it, and have learned to talk  
 ‘ after others.’

AGAIN: The same Author, speaking  
 of the abuse of taking Words upon trust,  
 observes, (a) ‘ That the Multiplication  
 ‘ and Obstinacy of Disputes, which has  
 ‘ so laid waste the Intellectual World, is  
 ‘ owing to nothing more, than to this ill  
 ‘ use of Words. For tho’ it be generally  
 ‘ believed, that there is great diversity of  
 ‘ Opinions in the Volumes and variety of  
 ‘ Controversies the World is distracted  
 ‘ with; yet the most I can find, that the  
 ‘ contending Learned Men of different  
 ‘ Parties do, in their Arguings one with  
 ‘ another, is, that they speak different  
 ‘ Languages. For I am apt to imagine,  
 ‘ that when any of them quitting Terms,  
 ‘ think upon Things, and know what they  
 ‘ think; they think all the same: tho’

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(a) *Locke's Essay*, B. 3. c. 19. sect. 22.

‘ perhaps,

perhaps, what they would have, be different. SERM. V.

THE same Author, in (a) another passage of his Book, repeats the same Observation; 'Let us look into the Books of Controversy of any kind, there we shall see, that the Effect of obscure, unsteady or equivocal Terms, is nothing but noise, and wrangling about Sounds, without convincing or bettering a Man's Understanding. For if the Idea's be not agreed on between the Speaker and the Hearer, for which the Words stand, the Argument is not about Things, but Names: as often as such a word, whose signification is not ascertain'd betwixt them, comes in use, their Understandings have no other Object wherein they agree, but barely the Sound; the Things, that they think on at that time, as express'd by that Word, being quite different.'

AND again, in the following Section;  
(b) 'And here I desire it may be con-

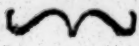
(a) *Locke's Essay*, B. 3. c. 11. sect. 6.

(b) *Ibid.* sect. 7.

sider'd,

SERM.

V.



‘ sider’d, and carefully examin’d, whether  
 ‘ the greatest part of the Disputes in the  
 ‘ World, are not meerly Verbal, and about  
 ‘ the Signification of Words ; and whe-  
 ‘ ther, if the Terms they are made in,  
 ‘ were defined, and reduced in their Sig-  
 ‘ nification (as they must be, where they  
 ‘ signify any thing) to determined Col-  
 ‘ lections of the simple Ideas they do on  
 ‘ should stand for ; those Disputes would  
 ‘ end of themselves, and immediately  
 ‘ vanish.’

I HAVE been the more particular in  
 citing these Passages, because I think that  
 they are very remarkable, and give us a  
 very just Notion of the Nature, Origin,  
 and Value of Controversies in general. For  
 if these Observations be true ; which, the  
 more we consider them, and apply them  
 to any particular Controversies, the more  
 reason we shall find to believe ; it fol-  
 lows, that there is but little at the bot-  
 tom of all Disputes, and that the contend-  
 ing Parties do not differ so much either  
 from the Truth, or from each other, as  
 we are apt to imagine.

To



To which I shall only add, That these SERM.  
 Observations are more applicable to Reli- V.  
 gious Controversies than to any other, and  
 hold much stronger of them. For what  
 is commonly made the Subject of Religious  
 Controversies, being often such things as  
 we have no adequate Idea's of, and for  
 which we want proper Expressions; this  
 will necessarily occasion greater Obscurity,  
 Confusion, and Misunderstanding, than in  
 those Subjects of which we have juster  
 Idea's, and are better supply'd with apt  
 Words to express our Thoughts and Con-  
 ceptions.

*Seventhly and Lastly:* WERE the Disputes  
 among Christians never so many or great;  
 they ought not to stagger our Faith, and  
 make us call in question the Truth of Chri-  
 stianity, but should rather confirm us in  
 our belief of it: because these very Dis-  
 putes were plainly and expressly foretold,  
 and we are taught by our Religion to expect  
 them. *Suppose ye* (says our Saviour) *that I*  
*am come to give peace on Earth?* *I tell you,*  
*Nay; but rather division:* Luke xii. 51.  
 And he often warns us to *beware of false*  
*Prophets, and false Doctrines.* St. Paul  
 gives

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SERM. gives us the same Caution, *Rom. xvi. 17.*  
 V. *Mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 1 Cor. xi. 19.*  
*For there must be also Heresies among you, that they which are approved, may be made manifest among you. And in his 1st Epistle to Timothy, chap. vi. 3, &c. he supposes there would arise some, who would teach otherwise than he did; who would dote about questions and strifes, of Words; who were Men of corrupt Minds, and would raise perverse disputings.*

So that the Disputes so much complain'd of in Christianity, are no other than what were foretold from the first beginning of it; and are therefore no argument *against*, but *for* the Truth of it. And this Argument is so much the stronger, if we consider what little reason there was, from the Nature of Christianity, to expect any such Disputes about it.

THE Plainness and Simplicity of the Doctrine of the Gospel, would, as one might well imagine, prevent all Disputes about it, if Men were not resolv'd to call

call every thing into dispute that is propos'd to them. SERM.  
V.

THERE are such excellent Rules of Unity and Peace prescrib'd in the Gospel, and these are enforc'd with such Motives, as might, if any thing could do it, make all Men agree and be of one mind: And yet the same Spirit, from whence this Doctrine and these Rules proceeded, did also foretell that Controversies would arise, and Christians should be greatly divided, *the Father against the Son, and the Son against the Father, &c.* And therefore these Divisions and Disputes cannot, in reason, be objected against the Truth of that Revelation in which they are so plainly foretold.

To all which I might further add, That much real Good has sprung from this imaginary Evil: That these Disputes have been very serviceable to the Cause of Truth, by putting Christians frequently upon looking back, (while they were not yet got far from the Head) to the *Apostles* Doctrine, to what was preach'd to them at first; and making them contend earnestly for that Faith, which, as it was once deliver'd to the Saints, so it was

N

preserv'd



SERM. preserv'd in its purity by this Agitation,  
V. and kept from that Corruption, which  
after came on, by degrees, and encreas'd.

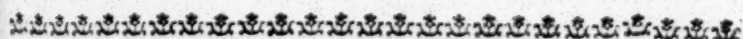
AND this, I hope, may suffice to shew,  
that notwithstanding all the Religious Dis-  
putes which have been maintain'd with  
such eagerness and resolution, the Chri-  
stian Revelation is True; and every Man  
who desires it, has sufficient Means of  
being assur'd of the Certainty of it.





## SERMON VI.

A farther Examination into the  
*Modern Free-Thinking*; And the  
Abuse and Misrepresentation of  
the Scriptures, and other Wri-  
ters.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast  
that which is good.*



THE *First* thing which I pro-  
pos'd from these Words, was,  
To enquire what the Apo-  
stle means by *proving all*  
*things*; to state the True  
Notion of that private Judgment or Free-  
dom

SERM.  
VI.

SERM. VI. dom of Thought which every Man ought to exercise in Religious Matters, and to shew wherein it consists.

THE *Second* thing I undertook, was, To consider what that *Free-Thinking* is which is *falsely so call'd*, and which some have lately taken up; and to shew how much it differs from that in the Text.

AND since there are some Rules which I laid down as necessary to be observ'd by every one who would Think freely and Reason justly upon any Subject; I propos'd to examine the present *Free-Thinking* by these Rules.

THE *First* of these was, That we should possess ourselves with a sincere Love of Truth, for its own sake.

WHETHER we thus love Truth will appear by our entertaining Propositions with greater or less degrees of Assurance than the Proofs they are built upon will warrant. This led me to examine some of the principal Arguments which the *Free-Thinkers* have made use of against Religion. And this has been the Subject of some of my last Discourses.

BEFORE



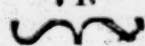
BEFORE I proceed any farther, I SERM.  
VI.  
shall make two or three brief Observa-  
tions upon what has been already said.

First, THERE is no Argument advanc'd by *Free-Thinkers* against Religion, but what holds as strongly against every thing else. Whatever Difficulties or Objections they have rais'd about a Divine Revelation, the Authority and Perfection of the Scriptures, the different Opinions maintain'd by the Professors of the same Religion, and the like, are to the full as great and many, in any other Case which can be put. Whatever they have alledg'd against any religious Truth, whether Natural or Reveal'd, may with equal Reason be urg'd against any other Truth.

IF it be uncertain whether the Books of Scripture, were wrote under the Divine Influence and Direction, and by the Persons whose Names they bear: If we are not sure that they are come down to us entire and uncorrupted: If these or any such Surmises be a sufficient Reason why we should reject and disbelieve the Scriptures; we may with equal Reason reject and disbelieve all History whatever, and discard at once all ancient Writings, all

SERM. the Records and Monuments of Antiquity.

VI.



If all Mens not agreeing in every point of Religion ; if a bare possibility that things may be otherwise than we imagine ; that there may be some latent Fallacy ; some secret Error or Mistake, be a good Justification of Infidelity : If nothing less than strict Demonstration, sensible and undeniable Evidence, be a firm ground of Faith ; Then there is an end of all Arts and Sciences, and every thing else as well as Religion, and all civil Action and human Business must cease. And therefore,

*Secondly*, WHAT the *Free-Thinkers* advance in the case of Religion, ought to be made a general Maxim, and a standing Rule of Life. That, at least in Matters of any Moment, Men should never venture to Act but upon strict Demonstration and undeniable Evidence : That they should believe nothing but what cannot possibly be otherwise than true, and that Wise Men should be very cautious of believing any thing at all.

IF the *Free-Thinkers* would be consistent with themselves, they should act upon the same Principle in other Matters, which they pretend to act upon in Religion ;

igion; they should *think* as *freely* for themselves in every other concern, and believe as little as they do in that. They should not look upon *Priests* only, but upon Men of all Professions, as either *Crack-brain'd*, or *Knavish* and *Designing*; and should take no body's Word for any thing, but insist upon a Demonstration for every thing: And then they would quickly see the ill tendency and absurdity of their Principles.

SERM.  
VI.  


SHOULD this *Free-Thinking* prevail, it would fare as ill with the Civil as the Religious Life, and with Men of Business and Action, as with those of Letters and Leisure. The Wise Man, in this Case, would have no advantage over the Fool; nor would all the Light we have, or can possibly have, in this imperfect State, be preferable to Darkness. Upon these Principles all Societies must immediately disband, the Civil World of Mankind be brought to confusion, and Mankind itself in a short time come to an end.

WE are bid to *think freely* for ourselves; not to be led and govern'd, influenc'd and directed by others; to do nothing but what we our selves are sure is



SERM. right; and to believe nothing but what we  
 VI. can demonstrate to ourselves to be true.

SUPPOSE now a Subject should refuse to pay Tribute, or a Tenant his Rent, 'till all Titles be made out, and every Claim settled and adjusted to a Demonstration. Suppose the Husbandman should refuse to till or sow his Ground; the Merchant and the Banker, the Artificer and the Soldier, should decline their several Callings, and wait for a demonstrative Assurance of Success. Suppose Men should neither Eat, nor Drink, nor take Physick, nor do any of these things, 'till they had undeniable Evidence that all these things are what they suppose them to be, and will have the Effects which they expect from them: Would there not, at this rate, be an end of all Business and Action? And yet all this is the highest and noblest *Free-Thinking*, in the Modern sense of that Phrase.

BUT can any thing be more ridiculous and absurd than this? The Management of all human Concerns, whatever proceeds upon Moral Evidence, and not upon Mathematical Proofs; upon probable, and not, strictly speaking, certain and infallible

fallible grounds of Hope and Fear ; upon SERM.  
rational, but not demonstrative Inference. VI.

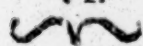
And if Men were to transact nothing in the common Affairs of Life, but upon such Evidence as *Free-Thinkers* require in Religion, they must sit still without doing any thing at all, and put a stop for ever to all worldly Affairs and Concerns. Wherefore,

*Thirdly*, SINCE the *Free-Thinkers* require that Evidence in Matters relating to Religion, which they do not insist upon in other things : Since they withhold their Assent from that Evidence in Religion, which they allow to be sufficient in other Cases : Since they make those Objections in Religion, which they do not make, and would be ashamed to make in any other Cause : We may justly suppose, that the Principles which they have advanced, are advanced only for the sake of Religion, that is, for the subversion of all Religion, and rooting it out of the World ; tho' these Principles are as applicable to other Things as to Religion, and would destroy every thing else as well as that.

THESE

SERM.

VI.



THESE Remarks are, I think, fully justify'd, from what has been already said; from whence it plainly appears, that the Modern *Free-Thinkers* are very deficient in the *First* Rule laid down, which was, To possess ourselves with a sincere Love of Truth, for its own sake.

THE *Second* was, not to be afraid of Truth, or any of the Consequences of it.

AND this is a Rule which the *Free-Thinkers* have transgress'd as much as the former. They have discover'd as much Fear, as Hatred of the Truth; and have done all they can to decline it, and get out of its way. And this too appears, in a great measure, from what has been already said. For where-ever Men give greater degrees of assent to some Propositions, and less to others, than the Proofs they are built upon will warrant; this can proceed from nothing but their loving some Truths, and hating and fearing others.

THO' all Truths, as such, be of the same nature, and Truth is simple, uniform, and consistent with it self; yet some Truths are of a greater and different Consequence from



from others, and do more nearly affect and concern us. SERM.  
VI.

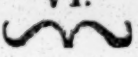
THIS is the Case of Religious Truths ; and this is the reason why Men will not submit to the Evidence there, which they readily yield to in other Cases. *They love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.*

THE great Principles of Natural Religion, the Being and Providence of God ; the difference of Moral Good and Evil ; the Immortality of the Soul, and a Future State of Rewards and Punishments : The great Principles of Reveal'd Religion, which consist in a clearer and fuller discovery of the Principles of Natural Religion, in enjoining stricter Rules and Precepts for the government of our Lives and Actions, for the abstaining from all Vice and Wickedness, and the practice of universal Piety and Virtue : I say, these are Truths of the utmost Consequence and Importance, and determine our Happiness or Misery for ever, according as we conform to them, and are govern'd by them. And therefore Men who are unwilling to do this, who cannot think of *ordering their conversation aright*, and living agreeably to these Truths,

SERM. Truths, must needs be afraid of these  
 VI. Truths, and dread the Consequences of  
 them. Religion has its Threats as well as  
 Promises; sets before us *Punishment for*  
*Evil-doers*, as well as *Rewards for those*  
*that do well*. This is what the Gospel  
 has done in a most remarkable manner;  
 and therefore, as long as Men lead such  
 Lives as make them despair of the Promises  
 of Religion, they must needs look upon it  
 with Fear and Terror: They cannot help  
 wishing that all Religion was false and  
 groundless; and this will make 'em stand  
 out against the strongest Arguments, and  
 the clearest Proofs, and never yield, tho'  
 they be beaten and overcome.

IF the great Truths of Religion did not  
 by an unavoidable Consequence conclude  
 against wicked Men; had they no manner  
 of Influence upon their Eternal Happiness  
 or Misery, but were Matters of pure Spec-  
 ulation only, and ended barely in Truth  
 or Falshood, without any further Views;  
 I do not in the least question, (so clear is  
 their Evidence to an unprejudiced Mind)  
 but they would readily yield their assent  
 to them.

BUT

BUT alas! these Things are not Mat- SERM.  
ters of Speculation only, but do most near- VI.  
ly concern us, and affect our greatest, and   
our only true Interest. If there be a  
GOD, he will be a *Rewarder of all that*  
*diligently seek him*, and a severe Revenger  
of all who neglect and despise him. If  
the Soul of Man be Immortal, and there be  
indeed another Life after this, then shall  
the Righteous enjoy a blessed Immortality,  
and the Wicked shall be turn'd into Hell,  
and go into Everlasting Punishment.

THE Truths of Religion, upon ac-  
count of these and such-like Consequen-  
ces, are very dreadful Truths; and Men  
who do not love them, and resolve to  
live according to them, must necessa-  
rily fear them, and, for their own ease  
and quiet, do all they can to keep  
themselves from the knowledge and belief  
of them.

I do not doubt but the plainest Mathe-  
matical Truths would be call'd in question  
by some Men, if they were of the same  
Consequence with those of Religion. If,  
for Instance, it necessarily follow'd, that  
because the three Angles of a Triangle are  
equal to two Right ones, that therefore it  
was



SERM. VI. was utterly unlawful and desperately dangerous, for Men to allow themselves in riot and revelling, in chambering and wantonness, in strife and envy, and every evil work; I doubt not but they would raise some Doubts and Difficulties even about this. But because this draws no such Consequences after it as the Principles of Religion manifestly do, therefore Men willingly assent to this as true: And yet the Principles of Religion are as true, and capable of as good Proof in their kind as this is, or the Principles of any other Science whatsoever.

So that the Scepticism and Infidelity, the Hesitation and Doubting, that Hardness of Heart, and Difficulty of being Perswaded and Convinced in Religious Matters, but not in any other Concern, (in which the very Essence of our Modern *Free-Thinking* seems to consist) is greatly owing, and may, among other Causes, be justly ascrib'd to a Fear and Dread of Religious Truths, and the Consequences of them.

THE *Third* Rule which I laid down as necessary to be observ'd in this Matter,

was,

was, To pursue our Enquiries with the SERM.  
utmost Sincerity and Impartiality. VI.

THERE is nothing wherein the *Free-Thinkers* have more shamefully fallen short of the Character which they pretend to, than in this. What they so much magnify and commend for *Free-Thinking*, is manifestly the farthest from it of any thing that can possibly be conceiv'd. 'Tis really Thinking with the strongest Prejudices and Prepossessions; with the grossest Partiality and Insincerity. While they boast of their own Liberty, and promise the same to others, they are manifestly under the utmost Slavery and Servitude, and would bring all others, who will be guided by their Principles and Maxims, under the same bondage of Corruption. They plainly shew their aversion to those Propositions which they come to examine; and while they pretend to be in search of the True Religion, they cannot forbear telling us, that they are Enemies to all.

THIS Prejudice and Partiality appears plainly from the Management of their Arguments, and the Methods they have made use of to attack and undermine Religion.

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VI.

ligion. Sometimes they treat the most serious Subjects, in the most light and jocular Manner, in a way of Mirth and Merriment, and represent the gravest things in the most ridiculous dress. This indeed is agreeable to the profess'd Maxims of a great Master and Leader in their own Sect, who affirms, and has wrote a prophane Book, to prove, that Ridicule is the only infallible test of Truth; and that the best way to know what is True, is to try whether it will bear being Ridicul'd (a).

At other times they fly from the Point in dispute, and betake themselves to personal Picques and Reflections, and endeavour to render the Cause itself of Religion odious and ridiculous, by exposing and laying open the Follies and Imprudencies of the Professors and Ministers of it. To which purpose they have industriously collected and laid together all the most absurd and ridiculous Opinions, all the foolish and inconsistent Sayings of Christians, but especially of Christian

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(a) *Sensus Communis*: An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humour: In a Letter to a Friend. 8vo. Lond 1709



Priests, which they could meet with in SERM.  
the course of above 1600 Years; and VI.  
have more largely insisted upon the indiscreet and unwary Writings of some late Authors.

BUT what is all this to the Purpose? What tho' many Christian Writers have advanc'd such Notions as are not capable of being defended; What is this to Christianity itself? For the Truth or Falshood of the Christian Revelation, does not depend upon what is said or wrote now by any who profess to believe that Revelation; but, upon what was done many Ages past, for the Truth and Confirmation of it. Suppose we should treat any other Profession as these Men have done Divinity, and should reckon up all the Follies and Absurdities which have dropt from the Tongues or Pens of Lawyers or Physitians: Would this be look'd upon as a good Reason why those Professions should be abolish'd as useless and insignificant? Is this any Argument that there is nothing true or certain in these things? And yet this is the Argument which *Free-Thinkers* urge against Religion, especially the Christian Religion; and

SERM. 'tis thus they treat the Christian Priests,  
 VI. and the Ministers of the Gospel. The  
 best Cause in the World, may happen  
 sometimes to fall into the hands of weak  
 and foolish Patrons. And therefore if  
 we would be satisfy'd of the Truth and  
 Justice of any Cause, we should consider  
 what the ablest as well as the weakest  
 Advocates have to say for it : otherwise  
 we betray manifest Partiality and Preju-  
 dice against it. This is the Method which  
 the *Free-Thinkers* should have us'd, in  
 order to satisfy themselves of the Truth  
 of Religion. But instead of this, they  
 have turn'd over many Volumes that have  
 been wrote about our holy Religion, on  
 purpose to pick out all the weak, absurd,  
 and inconsistent things that are in them,  
 and so to make sport for themselves and  
 others ; while they have *wisely* past over  
 the many substantial and unanswerable  
 Proofs and Defences which have been  
 made of it.

IF any modern Writer has drawn up  
 an absurd and inconsistent Scheme of Chri-  
 stianity in general, or given a false Expi-  
 cation of any particular Doctrine of it  
 that, to be sure, is Christianity itself, and

the true Doctrine of the Gospel; and if SERM.  
VI.  
they can but overthrow any of these modern Schemes of Christianity, and human Explications of its Doctrines, which is not difficult, especially, if (as they have done) we single out the weakest; Then Christianity it self is effectually overthrown.

I have already taken notice of this unfair way of proceeding in the Doctrine of the TRINITY; which, even under such a human Explication of it, as they themselves can never believe to be a true one, they are pleas'd to call the most fundamental Doctrine of the Christian Religion.

THEY tell us, in another place, (a) That the Doctrine of *Original Sin*, is the Foundation of the whole Christian Religion, and most certainly of the most fundamental Doctrine of the Christian Religion. So that, according to them, the Doctrine of *Original Sin* is the Foundation of the Doctrine of the *Trinity*, and under that particular Explication of it which they have singled out. It were easy to go on at this rate, and by picking out all the weak

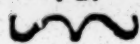
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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 72.



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things which Men have advanc'd upon the several Heads of the Christian Religion, to represent Christianity as the most inconsistent Scheme in the World. And this is the Method which *Free-Thinkers* have taken to expose Religion. And rather than fail in their Attempt, if they cannot find Schemes of the Christian Religion absurd enough for their Purpose in other Peoples Writings, they will make some of their own; of which a late Author has given us a remarkable Instance.

BUT it is very unfair and disingenuous, to make Religion it self suffer for the Follies and Imprudencies of those who profess it; and to charge upon Christianity it self, all the false and foolish Notions which have been maintain'd at any time by Christians. And yet this is one of the chief Arguments of *Free-Thinkers* against Religion; and to make this Argument appear the stronger, they have not only pick'd out the weakest things that have been said by Christians, but have grossly misrepresented or shamefully mistaken their Meaning.

IT would be endless to set down all the Instances of this kind; and it is needless for me to do it, because it has already been

so well done by better hands. However, SERM.  
VI. it may not be altogether improper to produce some of them here, to shew how widely they have transgress'd this Rule, of pursuing their Enquiries with the utmost Sincerity and Impartiality.

THE first Instance I shall mention, is their Quotation from Bishop *Taylor*, which, (a) they say, gives us *an Idea of the Nature of our holy Books*; and 'tis plainly their Design, in producing that Passage at large, to give us such an Idea of the Obscurity and Difficulty of the Scriptures, as to make us think it impossible for us to gather any thing with Certainty, out of them. This is plainly the Scope of the Passage, consider'd by itself; and this is as plainly their Design in producing it, as appears from what immediately follows, viz. an enumeration of *the diversity of Opinions of the Priests of the Church of England, all pretended to be deduc'd from the Scriptures*.

BUT whoever considers the main Scope either of the Book (b) out of which this

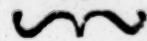
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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 58.

(b) *Liberty of Propheying*, sect. 3.

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Passage is taken, or of the Passage it self as it stands there, will quickly be satisfy'd, that this was far from the Author's Meaning; that he did not design to magnify the Difficulties of Scripture to the prejudice of the Foundation of all Religion, or to insinuate that it was either impossible or difficult for Men to understand so much of the Scriptures as is necessary to Salvation. On the contrary, he asserts, in the same Section out of which this Passage is quoted, that *all Sects of Christians agree in the Articles of the Creed, as things plainly and clearly set down, and as containing all that which is of simple and prime necessity.*

THAT the Scriptures are sufficiently plain in all necessary Points, the Bishop expressly and fully maintains in the foregoing Section; and the only Inference he draws from the many Difficulties there are in Interpreting Scripture, *i. e.* those Places of Scripture, which contain *Mysteries*, and *Matters of Question upon which there is a Vail*, is this, — That *he that is the wisest, and by consequence the likeliest to expound truest in all probability of Reason, will be very far from Confidence.* — And therefore, *a wise Man who considers this, would not wil-*  
lingly



ingly be prescrib'd to by others ; and there-fore, if he be also a just Man, he will not impose upon others ; for it is best every Man should be left in that Liberty from which no Man can justly take him, unless he could secure him from Error. S E R M.  
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AND 'tis evidently the Design of that whole Book, to expose the Tyranny of the Church of Rome, for their unreasonable Impositions ; and the Violence and Dogmaticalness of other bigotted Sects, in maintaining and propagating their several Opinions ; and to furnish all Christians with an excellent Argument for bearing with one another's Differences in Matters not necessary either to a true Faith, or a good Life.

Again ; (a) Christianity is represented as falling short of *Epicurus's* Morality in point of Friendship, and no where particularly requiring of us such a high degree of that Virtue, as he required of his Followers. And here again Bishop Taylor (b) is brought in as maintaining this Charge against Christianity. But both Christianity and that Christian Bishop are grossly mis-

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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 130.

(b) A Discourse of the Nature and Offices of Friendship

SERM. represented in this Case. Tho' the word  
 VI. *Friendship*, in that particular signification  
 which human Writings put upon it, is not  
 to be found in the New Testament, yet the  
 Virtue itself is there to be found, and is car-  
 ried to a higher pitch than in any of the Hea-  
 then Moralists. For what is that universal  
 Love and Good-Will which we are comman-  
 ded to bear towards all Men, and to exercise  
 by doing all the Good we can to all Men? Is  
 it not the highest and the noblest Instance  
 of Friendship? Was not our Saviour the  
 best and greatest Friend that ever the World  
 had? And has He not press'd this Duty upon  
 his Disciples in all imaginable Instances,  
 and to the highest Degree that is possible?  
 Was it not one great design of his coming  
 to reconcile Men to one another, as well as  
 to God? Does not his Doctrine manifestly  
 tend to introduce and cultivate universal  
 Friendship and Beneficence amongst Men?  
 And has He not made this the distinguish-  
 ing Mark and Character of his Disciples,  
*By this shall all Men know that ye are my  
 Disciples, if ye love one another?*

How ridiculous then, as well as dis-  
 ingenious is it, after all this, to represent  
 the Gospel of our Saviour, as coming short  
 of

of the Doctrine of *Epicurus* in this Point ! SERM.  
But, it seems, there is nothing so false, VI.  
ridiculous and absurd, which *Free-Thinkers*  
are not capable of.

As to Bishop *Taylor*, whom they bring in to vouch for the Truth of this; if He, and ten thousand more, should have said all that they would have Him, 'tis nothing to the Purpose : But they have misrepresented his Meaning, as much as they have our Saviour's Doctrine. For immediately after the Passage which they have quoted, He has these Words; —  
*But by Friendships, I suppose you mean, the greatest Love, and the greatest Usefulness, and the most open Communication, and the noblest Sufferings, and the most exemplar Faithfulness, and the severest Truth, and the heartiest Counsel, and the greatest Union of Minds, of which brave Men and Women are capable.*

CAN there be any better and truer Friendship than is here describ'd? And this is the Friendship which the Gospel has enjoin'd us. *But then, (as Bishop Taylor goes on) I must tell you, that Christianity hath new christned it, and calls this, Charity; — And Christian Charity is Friend-*  
*ship*



SERM. *ship to all the World.* We see then, that  
 VI. whatever becomes of the word *Friendship*,  
 and Words are not worth contending for,  
 the Thing itself, the Duty or Virtue meant  
 by it, makes the brightest part of the Doc-  
 trine of the Gospel, and was practis'd in  
 far greater Perfection by our Saviour, and  
 his Apostles, and the primitive Christians,  
 than by *Epicurus* or any of his *Free-Think-*  
*ing* Sect.

THE next Great Man I shall take no-  
 tice of, whom they have grossly abus'd  
 and misrepresented, is Arch-Bishop *Tillot-*  
*son* (a). Nothing can possibly be more  
 injurious to the Memory of that excel-  
 lent Man, than to rank Him with *Epi-*  
*curus* and *Hobbs*, whose Principles he has  
 so severely and substantially expos'd and  
 confuted. But there is no Protection or  
 Defence against Malice and Slander; and  
 the best Men have always met with the  
 worst Treatment from the Loose and Vi-  
 cious. No Man, since the Primitive Times,  
 has been more serviceable to the Cause of  
 God and Religion, than this great and excel-  
 lent Prelate. No Man has more effectually

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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 171.

expos'd the Weakness and Folly of Atheism, S E R M. VI. Scepticism, and Infidelity; or demonstrated the Truth, and recommended the Practice of Religion, with greater strength of Reason, and more perswasive Arguments. And therefore they can never be Friends to his Memory, who are Enemies to all Religion; but must, in their own defence, do all they can to disgrace and misrepresent his Writings.

WHAT he has said against Popish Zeal and Bigottry, against spiritual Tyranny, and unchristian Cruelty, is represented by some as Looseness and Licentiousness, and an Indifference for all Religion. And he is said to have caus'd several to turn Atheists, and ridicule the Priesthood and Religion; and to have been himself *the gravest Atheist that ever was.*

AT this rate no Man's Character can be secure: But the true reason of this foul Slander, is the Excellency of his Person and Performances. As long as his Writings continue to be read and admir'd, which they will be as long as the *English* Tongue is known and understood, *Free-Thinking*, in the present sense of that Phrase, can never prevail. Jestings and Scoffing at Religion,

SERM. Religion, can never pass for Argument  
 VI. against it ; nor roving and rambling Talk,  
 for just and regular Reasoning : But Rational Religion, a discreet and well-temper'd Zeal, unaffected Devotion, and sincere Piety and Goodness, must take place in all those who read and practise his Doctrine.

NEXT to their misrepresentation of the best Christian Divine, is their gross abuse of the best Heathen Moralist, I mean *Cicero*, whose Works because they are read and admir'd by all who understand that Language, and contain such excellent Precepts of Morality, and such convincing Arguments for the Truth of the Principles of Natural Religion ; they have endeavour'd to discredit him, by putting him into the same List with *Aristotle* and *Epicurus*, whose absurd and impious Opinions he has fully confuted ; and have done all they can to disguise and misrepresent his Meaning.

THE Immortality of the Soul, is a Point which these Gentlemen propose to *think freely* of ; and, I believe, would be glad to *think themselves out* of it : 'Tis a Cause wherein they have of late been most  
 signally



signally and shamefully baffled (a): And now they wou'd bring *Cicero* over to their side, and represent him as an Enemy to this Doctrine; tho' there is no one Point which he more constantly maintains, and of which he expresses not only great hopes, but even a firm belief, and full assurance.

THEY tell us, (b) That *Cicero's* Philosophical Works are mostly written in Dialogue; and that the Priests have put a Common Imposition upon the World, in representing that as *Cicero's* own Sense and Reasoning, which he only puts in the mouth of those whom he confutes. Thus they would insinuate, that all those noble Passages which have so often been produc'd out of *Cicero*, for the Immortality of the Soul, and a Future State, are not *Cicero's* sense of Things, but the opinions of others whom he undertakes to confute. For they tell us, that this will utterly disarm the Enemies of *Free-Thinking*, of *Cicero's* Authority.

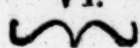
BUT the misrepresentations of this ex-

(a) See Dr. Clarke's Letter to Mr. Dodwell, 8vo. 1706, and the several Defences of the Argument made use of in that Letter, to prove the Immateriality and Natural Immortality of the Soul.

(b) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 137.

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cellent Author, which they so much complain of, lie at their own door ; and they will never be able to disarm the Priests of *Cicero's* Authority, 'till they have disarm'd them of their Senses and Understanding, and engross'd all Knowledge and Learning to themselves. There is nothing in all *Cicero's* Works wherein he speaks his own mind more plainly, than he does in the Immortality of the Soul. There is a Treatise of this Author, which he styles *Cato Major*, where, under the Person of *Cato*, he professedly speaks his own Thoughts of the Immortality of the Soul, and expresses the utmost Pleasure and Satisfaction in that opinion, and seems to be wholly wrapt up, and even ravish'd with the glorious Prospect and Expectation of a Future State. There is also another little Treatise, call'd *Somnium Scipionis*, wherein he delivers this as his own opinion, in as full and express words as is possible. These Books are in every School boy's hands : but the *Free-Thinkers* seem not to have read them ; if they had, they could never represent *Tully* as on their side of the question, and make him a downright Atheist and Infidel.

It would be a pleasant and an easy Task

to turn over all the Works of this excellent S E R M. VI. Author, and lay together in one view the many exprefs Testimonies he has given the World of his belief of this great Article : But it will be time enough to do this, when the *Free-Thinkers* have disarm'd us of the Authority of the two Treatises which I have just now referr'd to.

MY Lord Bacon (a) is another Authority which the *Free-Thinkers* would gain over to their Side ; to which purpose they have dealt by him as they have by others, and misrepresented his meaning. They tell us, that he has explain'd the whole Secret of Superstition, in a certain Passage of his Writings which they have quoted, wherein there are these words, — *Veruntamen eadem natura modum tenere nescia est, sed timoribus salutaribus semper vanos & inanes admiscet.* Which they have thus honestly translated, — *And yet this Nature knows not how to keep a mean, but always intermixeth vain and empty Fears.*

TH U S he is made by these Men to represent all Fears as idle and groundless, useless and hurtful ; whereas he expressly mentions *timores salutaes*, by which we

(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 169.



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may justly suppose he meant Religious Fears, the Fear of God, and of a Future Reckoning.

IT would be endless to take notice of all the Misrepresentations they have made of the Authors they have quoted in defence of their opinions. I believe I should do them no wrong, if I should say, that there is scarce one Author whom they have not either ignorantly mistaken, or wilfully misrepresented. The Instances already produc'd, are sufficient to shew their Insincerity and Partiality in their Enquiries after Truth.

BUT their gross abuse and misrepresentation of Scripture ought to be taken notice of, and abhorr'd by every one who has any reverence for any thing that is sacred. I shall single out two remarkable Instances of this.

THE first is that of the Prophets, whom they call *great Free-Thinkers*, and tell us, *(a) That they have written with as great liberty against the establish'd Religion of the Jews, (which the People look'd on as the Institution of God Himself) as if they believ'd it was all Imposture; and with as great liberty against their Priests and Prophets, as*

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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 153.

the Author of The Rights of the Christian Church has done against the Priests and Prophets of our Israel. SERM.  
VI.

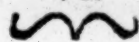
THE Prophets, we are told, were great *Free-Thinkers*; and the reason why they are reckon'd to have been such great *Free-Thinkers*, is, because they have written with great Liberty against the establish'd Religion of the Jews. For the present *Free-Thinking* (as I have already observ'd) consists in contradicting any receiv'd and establish'd Opinions, tho' they are establish'd upon never so great Authority, even that of God Himself.

Now besides that the Prophets had a divine Commission for what they thus freely said; which neither the Author of *The Rights*, &c. nor our *Free-Thinkers* can pretend to, any more than they can to the Spirit of Prophecy: Besides this, what was it which the Prophets thus freely reprov'd, and wrote against with such great liberty? the establish'd Religion of the Jews, and the Institutions of God Himself? No; they knew much better, and had more veneration for the divine Commands than this comes to. They only reprov'd the corrupt Practices of the Jews, their

P insincere

S E R M.

VI.



insincere and partial observance of the establish'd Religion; their outward Formality, and gross Hypocrisy; their preferring the external Performances of Religion, to inward Purity and Holiness; the lighter and less considerable, to the *weightier Matters of the Law*, to *Judgment, Mercy, and Truth*. In all which the People were too often encourag'd by the false Doctrine and bad examples of their Priests, whose degeneracy and corruption, the abuses and undue usurpation of their Office, the Prophets do frequently complain of, and severely reprove.

THIS is plainly the Scope and Design of all those Places which the *Free-Thinkers* have alledg'd out of the Prophets, whose Reproofs and Invectives are levell'd against these Abuses and Corruptions, and not against the establish'd Religion of the Jews or the Jewish Priesthood, as they have very basely and insincerely represented it.

WHEN the Ministers of the Gospel Reprove their People, as they are bound to do, for making an outward Profession of Christianity, without an answerable Practice; for expressing all their Zeal for Sacraments and Ordinances, and taking little



or no care of Piety and a good Life : would it not be very disingenuous, and absurdly malicious, to represent such Ministers as Mocking and Exposing Christianity it self, and even Denying the Divine Institution of the Sacraments ? And yet this Charge would be altogether as just as that which the *Free-Thinkers* have brought against the Prophets, the case being exactly the same.

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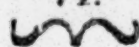
THE other Instance of their abuse of Scripture, is in the case of (a) *Solomon*, whom they are very desirous to adopt into their own Sect, and make a Free-Thinker, because he was a *Free-Liver*. He is introduced as an Infidel, as asserting the Eternity of the World, and denying a Future State. But upon what is this Charge grounded ? Upon miserable Ignorance, or gross Misrepresentation of *Solomon's* Sense.

THE *Free-Thinkers*, in their Interpretation of this Book of *Solomon*, are really guilty of that Imposition which they falsely charge upon the Priests, with regard to *Cicero*. For this Book of *Ecclesiastes* is written by way of Dialogue, as *Cicero's* Philosophical Pieces mostly are, where Atheists

(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 150.

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VI.

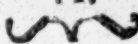


and Infidels are introduc'd arguing for their several Opinions. And those Passages of this Book which they have produc'd in favour of what they call *Free-Thinking*, i.e. of Atheism and Infidelity, are not the words of *Solomon* Himself, nor do they express his sense of those Things; but are the words which he puts into the mouth of Atheists and Infidels, and represent their sentiments of the Matter; which *Solomon* is so far from approving, that he confutes them in other parts of that Book. 'Tis thus that they have misrepresented *Solomon*; and (a) because they complain of the Priests, for sending the Laity to the Writings of the Fathers, to find what was not in them; I suppose, they mean what they could not see to be in them, for want of understanding them: I shall refer them, for their better understanding of this Book of *Solomon*, to those who have commented upon it in the English Tongue, and particularly to Mr. *Poole* and Mr. *Gataker*, and Bishop *Patrick*.

AFTER they had charg'd *Solomon* with denying the Immortality of the Soul, that is, out of Ignorance of this great

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(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 140.

Truth, they have thought fit to make a SERM.  
VI.  
Vindication for Him, which is to the full,   
as wise as the Charge is true.

THEY tell us, that the Reader may be  
(a) *surpriz'd that so wise a Man as Solomon should deny so important a Truth. Wherefore, for the Vindication of Solomon's want of Knowledge in this Point, they observe, first, that the Immortality of the Soul, was no where plain in the Old Testament. It was not so plain in the Old Testament, as it is in the New. And being no express part of the Mosaical Law or Covenant, the common People of the Jewish Nation, I believe, were ignorant of it. But there can be no doubt but the great Men among the Jews, those especially who were favour'd with Divine Revelations, the Patriarchs and Prophets, Moses, and David, and Solomon, had a certain knowledge of this Truth. Solomon's knowledge of it is very plain from several Passages in his Writings. He tells us in the 14th of Prov. 32. verse, That the Righteous hath hope in his Death. Which Words have no Manner of Sense and Meaning but upon the Supposition of a Future State. For Hope always*

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(a) Discourse, &c. Note, pag. 152.



SERM. VI. looks forward, and has respect to something that is Future : But if Death puts a final End to our Being ; if, according to the *Free-Thinkers Creed*, we die like Dogs and Affes, and have no After-Existence ; What Hope can the Righteous have in his Death, any more than the Wicked ? or, how can either of them have any Hope at all ? This Hope can be built upon nothing but the belief of the Souls Immortality, and a Future State of Retribution.

EVEN in this *Free-Thinking Book of Ecclesiastes*, the Author fully shews his belief of this great Article. What else can be the Meaning of that Passage in the 11th chap. 9. ver. *Rejoyce, O young Man, in thy Youth — but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgment.* Again, in the 12th chap. and 1st verse, *Remember thy Creator in the days of thy Youth, &c.* And lastly, he closes his Book with this serious Admonition, — *Fear God, and keep his Commandments ; for this is the whole duty of Man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

BUT

BUT the best Vindication of Solomon's S E R M.  
 Ignorance is still behind. They tell us, VI.  
 that so wise a Man as *Solomon* might deny  
 so important a Truth, because it was (a)  
*deny'd by the Sadducees, the most Philoso-*  
*phical part of the Jewish Nation; and was*  
*thought doubtful by most Sects of the Gre-*  
*cian Philosophers, and deny'd by the Stoicks,*  
 &c.

Now, not to take notice of the Pre-  
 ference given to the *Sadducees*, as the most  
 Philosophical part of the Jewish Nation;  
 the only reason of which, I suppose, is,  
 because they deny'd the Immortality of  
 the Soul; a noble instance of their deep  
 Philosophy and *Free-Thinking*. For *the*  
*Sadducees say that there is no Resurrection,*  
*neither Angel, nor Spirit, Act. xxiii. 8. but*  
*the Pharisees confess both.* And, if they  
 had not been so weak, might have pass'd  
 for a more Learned and Philosophical Sect  
 than the *Sadducees*, for so in truth they  
 were. But, I say, to pass by this, let us  
 see how the Argument stands; — *Solo-*  
*mon*, who was the wisest of Men, and liv'd  
 in the Age of Prophecy, and was himself  
 divinely inspir'd, might well be ignorant

(a) Discourse, &c. Note, pag. 152.

216 *A farther* EXAMINATION

SERM. of the Immortality of the Soul ; because  
 VI. the *Sadducees*, who liv'd many hundred  
 Years after Him, in the decline of the  
 Jewish State, when Prophecy, and Vision  
 were ceas'd, and who had not the tithe  
 of his Wisdom, were ignorant of it.

AGAIN: *Solomon* might well be ignorant of so important a Truth, *because it was thought doubtful by the Grecian Philosophers, and deny'd by the Stoicks* ; Sects, which did not arise 'till many Ages after *Solomon*, and therefore could not possibly affect Him, or influence his Sentiments and Reasonings. And yet 'tis added, as a very natural Conclusion, (a) *No wonder therefore, if Solomon reason'd like the learned Men of his own Country, and the more learned Philosophers of the neighbouring Nations.*

HAD these learned Men been *Solomon's* Contemporaries, or liv'd before Him, and he had been conversant in their Writings, there wou'd have been some appearance of Reasoning in this. But to argue, that 'tis no wonder that *Solomon* should reason after such a particular manner, because they reason'd so who were born many Ages after *Solomon* was dead, is so like no Reasoning,

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(a) Discourse, &c. pag. 153.



that no Reasoning in the World was ever SERM.  
like it. VI.

WHAT has been said, may suffice to shew how little the *Free-Thinkers* have regarded the *Third* Rule I laid down which was, To pursue our Enquiries with the utmost Sincerity and Impartiality.

I should now proceed to examine how they have observ'd the *Fourth* Rule laid down: But of this, and what further remains of this *Second* Head of Discourse, at the next Opportunity.

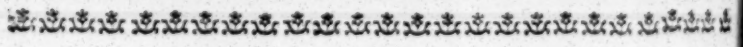


SERMON



## SERMON VII.


The *Modern Free-Thinking* farther  
Examind into : And, That the  
Use of *Guides* in Religion, is  
not inconsistent with the Use of  
Private Judgment.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast  
that which is good.*

SERM.  
VII.




THE *First* thing which I pro-  
pos'd from these words, was,  
To enquire what the Apo-  
stle means by *proving all  
things* ; to state the true  
Notion of that Private Judgment or Free-  
dom of Thought, which every Man ought

to exercise in Religious Matters ; and to shew wherein it consists. SERM.  
VII.

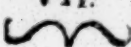
THE *Second*, was, To consider what that *Free-Thinking* is which is Falsely so call'd, and which some have lately taken up ; and to shew how much it differs from that in the Text. And because I laid down several Rules necessary to be observ'd in *Free-Thinking* Truly so call'd, I propos'd to examine the present *Free-Thinking* by those Rules.

I have already gone through Three of these Rules, and shall now proceed to

THE *Fourth* Rule which I laid down as necessary to be observ'd in our Enquiries after Truth ; which was, To use all proper Helps and Assistances which God has afforded us.

IF we have only the Light of Reason to guide us, we must be content with that, and make the best use of it we can. If God has added to the Light of Reason, that of Revelation ; we are thankfully to receive this inestimable Gift, and to apply it to those Ends and Purposes for which it was design'd. In points where Revelation is silent, we must still hearken to Reason : But where God has made a further discovery



SERM. VII. covery of his Will, we must hearken to That. We must consult the Scriptures, in which that Discovery is contain'd; and not pretend to determine those Points barely by Reason, which Revelation has determin'd for us, much less to determine them contrary to the divine Decisions.

THIS is one thing for which the *Free-Thinkers* are highly to be blam'd. They pretend not to be Enemies to Reveal'd Religion; and yet they are for discarding all Revelation, all Use of it, I mean, and trusting wholly to their own Reason. I have already observ'd, that by *Free-Thinking*, they often mean, Abstract Thinking, and Metaphysical Speculations, in opposition to Moral Evidence and Historical Proofs arising from ancient Testimonies and Matters of Fact. 'Tis thus that they would determine whether the Christian Religion be founded on Divine Revelation; whereas 'tis impossible to determine this without searching into History, and those Monuments of Antiquity which contain the Proofs of this Revelation. The most that we can determine by our own Thoughts and Reasoning, is, whether a Divine Revelation be possible or probable: But whether God

has

has actually made a Divine Revelation, or whether the Christian Religion be truly such, can be known only by examining the Proofs and Evidences we have for those Facts upon which the Truth of the Revelation depends.

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VII.  


AND even when they pretend at least to own this Revelation, they are not willing to submit to it, but prefer their own Thoughts and Reasonings before it. As to the Particulars belonging to any Divine Revelation, whether they be the Facts which are the Proofs and Evidences of it, or the Doctrines and Precepts contain'd in it; they are for determining all these in their own Thoughts, not only as to their Possibility, or Reasonableness, for that indeed is right, but as to their actual Certainty, without having recourse to the Original Testimonies and Records whereby alone they can be known.

THUS, for Instance, they would determine what Laws it pleas'd God at any time to give either Jews or Christians, by considering only what appears to them fit and reasonable to be enacted, without consulting either the Jewish or Christian Revelation. They resolve all Religion into  
what,

SERM. what, according to their shallow apprehension of Things, makes for the Benefit and Good of Human Society ; and whatever does not appear to them to contribute to this End, they do not think themselves oblig'd to.

VII.  


THUS a (a) celebrated *Free-Thinker*, in his *Dialogues*, introduces one of his Persons speaking after this manner: — You have very good reason, *Sophia*, to say, that no Law which is not useful to human Society, ought to be receiv'd. — That Institution or Law which brings not along with it Convenience and Utility, and fitness to lead us to our best End, whether it descend from Heaven, or arise out of the Earth, ought to be rejected and condemn'd.

NOW tho' I believe that God has made nothing a general Law to be observ'd at all Times by all Mankind, but what is for the general Good of Mankind ; which is plainly the case of all Moral Duties of Religion yet, as God knows what is in Man, and what is good for Man, better than Man himself ; so 'tis great Presumption in us to determine this Case, and to conclude that any particular Laws cannot be of God

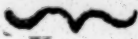
(a) Bruno, 2d Dial. pag. 88, 89.



*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 223

because we cannot at present conceive how S E R M.  
they are for our Good. We cannot con- VII.  
clude, that God has done for Men, all that  
Men shall judge is best for them, because  
it is suitable to his Goodness so to do. The  
*Romanists* say, 'tis best for Men, and so  
suitable to the Goodness of God, that there  
should be an infallible Judge of Controver-  
sies on Earth, and therefore there is one.  
And by the same Argument, We may prove,  
that every Man Himself is infallible, be-  
cause 'tis better for Men that every Man  
should be so. But certain Experience shews  
us the Falseness of this Argument.

As to the Matter in hand ; I think it  
a very good Argument, and which becomes  
the Ignorance and Humility of poor Crea-  
tures, to say, the Infinitely Wise God hath  
enacted such Laws, and therefore it is best  
for Men, and most for their Interest, that  
they should observe them. But methinks  
it favours too much of Presumption and  
Confidence of our own Wisdom, to say,  
that it is best for Men, and most for their  
Interest, to observe such and such Laws,  
and such only, and therefore God hath  
oblig'd them only to such. Besides which,  
God may certainly require some Things of  
us,

SERM.  
VII.  


us, purely for the trial of our Obedience, tho' the Things so requir'd should be of an indifferent nature, and have no direct or indirect tendency to our Good; which may possibly be the Case of some of the positive Duties of Religion. Nay, I might further add, that the true ground of Morality itself, in several Cases, can only be the Will and Law of a GOD, who sees Men in the dark, has in his hands Rewards and Punishments, and Power enough to call to account the proudest Offender. And since the Scriptures contain the Will and Law of God, we must have recourse to them for the knowledge of our Duty.

NOW tho' a great part of God's Laws are plainly calculated for the Good and Benefit of Human Society, as all the Laws relating to our Duty towards one another are; yet this is not the sole, or principal, or ultimate End of all God's Laws, and consequently this is not the true ground of all Morality; nor can we reasonably make this a Rule whereby to judge concerning all Laws, whether they be of God, or not. For supposing God to give us an express Revelation of a Future Eternal State, 'tis but reasonable to think that his Laws should be

*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 225

be calculated equally, or rather principally SERM.  
VII.  
with regard to that State, the providing for which, is our best and highest End; that they should be such as tend, not only to make us quiet and easy Here, but to improve and perfect our reasonable Natures, and fit us for Eternal Happiness Hereafter. And this is the Case of those Laws which relate to our Duty towards God, and our selves. Not but that they do likewise tend even to the Benefit of Human Society, but they do not seem to be so directly and absolutely necessary to it: However, this is not their sole, or principal, or ultimate End, which is rather the exalting our Natures, and fitting them for a more perfect State and Society hereafter. And upon supposition of such a State, such Laws are highly reasonable, and worthy of God. Besides this, the Wisdom of God may judge it useful to Men, consider'd as gather'd into the Society of his Church, to enjoin them some significant Rites or Ceremonies, such as the two Sacraments of Christianity are. Or if God thinks fit to act as a Temporal King over any peculiar People, as he did over the Jews, what wonder is it if he gives them a Body of

Q                      Civil



SERM. Civil and Ecclesiastical Laws, suited to  
 VII. their particular State, as he did to Them.  
 So that the Benefit and Good of Human  
 Society is not an adequate Rule to judge of  
 all Laws that are pretended to be of God.

ACCORDING to the same Rule, viz.  
 the Good and Benefit of Human Society,  
 the *Free-Thinkers* judge of the Sinfulness of  
 Human Actions, and the Degrees of that  
 Sinfulness. The Author just now quoted,  
 tells us, — (a) That 'tis the Pleasure of  
*Jupiter*, that Execution makes the Gods  
 to be lov'd and fear'd, only in so far as  
 they favour Human Society, and discour-  
 age those Vices which are dangerous to it;  
 and therefore Inward Sins ought only to be  
 judg'd Sins, inasmuch as they produce, or  
 may produce Outward Effects. And In-  
 ward Righteousness is never Righteousness,  
 without Outward Performances; as Plants  
 are useless and unprofitable, without Fruits  
 actually in Being, or in Expectation. And  
 'tis his Pleasure, that those should be  
 esteem'd the greatest Crimes, that are pre-  
 judicial to the Common-wealth; that those  
 which are prejudicial to a particular inno-  
 cent Person, should be esteem'd lesser; such

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(a) Bruno, 2d Dial. pag. 92, 93.

*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 227

as are committed between two Persons by Agreement, least of all ; and that such as don't give bad Example, or produce not bad Effects, and arise from an accidental *Impetus* in the Complexion and Temper of a particular Person, be judg'd no Crime at all.

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THIS overthrows the Foundation of all Virtue, and brings it down to Publick Convenience and Quiet. Upon these Principles, Men may be as wicked as they please, provided they give no disturbance to others ; or rather, nothing is to be esteem'd wicked, but what destroys the Publick Peace, and interrupts the Common Business and Affairs of Life. This introduces and justifies such a Freedom of Action, as is perfectly inconsistent with Religion, and makes way for *that golden and happy Law* (as the same (a) Author expresses it) *which Nature engrav'd,* SI LIBET, LICET ; Whatever you have a mind to, within these Bounds, you may freely indulge your self in.

THIS cancels all the Obligations which Reveal'd Religion has laid upon us ; and makes the Duties it enjoyns us, so many

(a) Bruno, 3d Dial. pag. 176.

SERM.  
VII.

useless and hurtful Burthens. That *labour* of love, and *abounding in the work of the Lord*, which is so often recommended to us; that religious Industry and Diligence which we are so frequently commanded to practise, is no better, according to this Author's representation, than Folly and Deceit. *She seduces the World to leave the certain present Good it has, and to be busied and tortur'd, for the Shadow of a future Glory.* This, and much more about the Folly of foregoing a Present for a Future Good, is indeed put into the mouth of (a) *Idleness*, who is there speaking; but it is with a design to ridicule all religious Care and Industry, upon account of the Uncertainty of the last Issue and Result of Things.

AND this is agreeable to the Principles of *Free-Thinkers*, who because they have not demonstrative Assurance of every thing are resolv'd to give their assent to no thing, and do not think themselves oblig'd to any thing which Religion lays upon them. But thus to disclaim all Knowledge in Religious Matters, to call every thing into question, and refuse our assent

(a) Bruno, 3d Dial. pag. 176, 177.



to any Truths, because we cannot know all things; and some things are uncertain and hard to be understood; is great Disengenuity and base Ingratitude to God, who is the bountiful Author of our Being, and has bestow'd upon us such a portion and degree of Knowledge, as does not only set us far above all the rest of the Inhabitants of this our Mansion, but is abundantly sufficient to all the great Ends and Purposes of our Being, and will enable us to answer the Design for which we were sent hither.

SERM.  
VII.

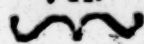
St. Peter tells us, in his 2d Epistle, chap. i. ver. 3. That *the Divine Power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto Life and Godliness*, i.e. whatsoever is necessary for the Conveniencies of Life, and the Information of Virtue; God has graciously put within the reach of our discovery the comfortable Provision for this Life, and the Way that leads to a better.

THE Comment which an excellent Writer, whom I have often refer'd to, gives us of this place, is as followeth. (a) 'How short soever (says he) our Knowledge may come of an universal or perfect

(a) Locks's Essay, B. I. c. I. sect 5.

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' Comprehension of whatsoever is, it yet  
 ' secures our great Concernments, that we  
 ' have Light enough to lead us to the Know-  
 ' ledge of our Maker, and the sight of our  
 ' own Duties. Men may find Matter suffi-  
 ' cient to busy their Heads, and employ  
 ' their Hands with Variety, Delight, and  
 ' Satisfaction, if they will not boldly quar-  
 ' rel with their own Constitution, and throw  
 ' away the Blessings their Hands are fill'd  
 ' with, because they are not big enough  
 ' to grasp every thing. We shall not have  
 ' much reason to complain of the narrow-  
 ' ness of our Minds, if we will but em-  
 ' ploy them about what may be of use to  
 ' us; for of that they are very capable:  
 ' And it will be an unpardonable, as well  
 ' as childish Peevishness, if we undervalue  
 ' the Advantages of our Knowledge, and  
 ' neglect to improve it to the Ends for  
 ' which it was given us, because there are  
 ' some things that are set out of the reach  
 ' of it. It will be no excuse to an idle and  
 ' untoward Servant, who would not attend  
 ' his Business by Candle-light, to plead that  
 ' he had not broad Sunshine. The Candle  
 ' that is set up in us, shines bright enough  
 ' for all our Purposes. The Discoveries we

can

*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 231

‘ can make with this, ought to satisfy us : **S E R M**  
‘ And we shall then use our Understandings **VII.**  
‘ right, when we entertain all Objects in  
‘ that way and proportion, that they are  
‘ suited to our Faculties ; and upon those  
‘ Grounds, they are capable of being pro-  
‘ pos’d to us ; and not peremptorily or in-  
‘ temperately require Demonstration, and  
‘ demand Certainty, where Probability only  
‘ is to be had, and which is sufficient to  
‘ govern all our Concernments. If we will  
‘ disbelieve every thing because we cannot  
‘ certainly know all things ; we shall do  
‘ much-what as wisely as he, who would  
‘ not use his Legs, but sit still and perish,  
‘ because he had no Wings to fly.

THIS is exactly the Case of our Mo-  
dern *Free-Thinkers* ; they refuse to make  
use of that Light and Knowledge which  
God has afforded them, and are resolv’d  
to call every thing into question, and to  
believe nothing, because they cannot know  
all things, nor have Demonstration for  
every Point which they propose to con-  
sider.

BUT certainly there is a great deal of  
difference between perfect and compleat  
Knowledge, and utter Ignorance. *Est qua-*



S E R M.

VII.

*dam prodire tenus, si non datur ultra.* 'Tis some advantage to us to know as much as we do; and the Knowledge which we have, is not to be despis'd, because it is not so much as we desire. We plainly find, that, by a due use of those Faculties which God has given us, we are able to make a considerable progress in several parts of Knowledge: And should we despise and neglect this, because we cannot arrive at Certainty in every Enquiry which we propose to make?

OUR best Reason, it must be own'd, is short and imperfect; but it is certainly better than none: And such as it is, we must be thankful for it, and make the best use of it we are able. That Revelation which God has been graciously pleas'd to afford us, is, in many Points, short of what our Curiosity might prompt us to wish for: But it is sufficient to supply the Defects of Reason, and inform us in all things necessary to be known, either to direct, or encourage us in our Duty. And we are highly ungrateful and blameable if we turn our backs upon the Scriptures, because every thing is not there reveal'd to us which we have a desire to know.

G O D

GOD has not absolutely forbid us the S E R M.  
knowledge of any Truth : but He has more VII.

than intimated, that it is in vain to carry our Enquiries in Religious Matters beyond those Discoveries which He has made ; and that we please him best, when we confine our Enquiries to those Things which most concern us, and which we are most able to know, from that Revelation which He has made to us. *Moses* has determin'd this Case for us ; *Deut. xxix. 29. Secret things belong unto the Lord our God : but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our children for ever.*

AND this is in it self the best method of arriving at Knowledge, to consider our own Strength, and to chuse such Things for the Objects of our Thoughts as are most fit for us, and we are most fitted to know, and may undertake with some hopes of success, upon account of those Helps and Assistances which God has afforded us ; and not, as the *Free-Thinkers*, to Think freely, after a rambling desultory manner, *de quolibet ente*, upon every thing which offers it self to us, whether we are like to make any thing of it, or no. For 'tis evident, that we are not equal to all Undertakings

SERM.  
VII.

takings of this kind. The knowledge of some Things is too excellent for us, and such as we can never hope to attain to in this imperfect State. And therefore we should not be high-minded, nor exercise our selves in Matters which are too hard for us ; but make those Things our chief study which are most useful ; and those, generally speaking, are most easy to be understood.

'Tis excellent Advice, which an (a) Author whom I have often quoted, gives us upon this Head : ‘ When we have well  
‘ survey’d the Powers of our own Minds,  
‘ and made some estimate what we may  
‘ expect from them, we shall not be inclin’d either to sit still, and not set our  
‘ Thoughts on work at all, in despair  
‘ of knowing any thing ; nor, on the  
‘ other side, question every thing, and  
‘ disclaim all Knowledge, because some  
‘ things are not to be understood. ’Tis  
‘ of great use to the Sailor to know  
‘ the Length of his Line, tho’ he cannot  
‘ with it fathom all the Depths of the  
‘ Ocean. ’Tis well he knows that it is  
‘ long enough to reach the bottom, at

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(a) *Locke's Essay, B. I. c. I. sect. 6, 7.*



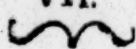
such Places as are necessary to direct his  
Voyage, and caution him against running  
upon Shoals that may ruine him. Our  
business here, is not to know all things,  
but those which concern our Conduct.  
If we can find out those Measures, where-  
by a rational Creature, put in that state  
which Man is in, in this World, may,  
and ought to govern his Opinions and  
Actions depending thereupon, we need  
not be troubled that some other things  
escape our knowledge.

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THE first step towards satisfying  
several Enquiries, the Mind of Man is  
very apt to run into, is, to take a survey  
of our own Understandings, examine our  
own Powers, and see to what things they  
are adapted. Till that is done, we begin  
at the wrong end, and in vain seek for  
satisfaction in a quiet and sure possession  
of Truths, that most concern us, whilst  
we let loose our Thoughts into the vast  
Ocean of Being, as if all that boundless  
Extent, were the natural and undoubted  
possession of our Understandings, where-  
in there was nothing exempt from its  
Decisions, or that escaped its Compre-  
hension. Thus Men, extending their  
Enquiries

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Enquiries beyond their Capacities, and letting their Thoughts wander into those depths, where they can find no sure footing ; 'tis no wonder that they raise Questions, and multiply Disputes, which never coming to any clear Resolution, are properly only to continue and encrease their Doubts, and to confirm them at last in perfect Scepticism. Whereas were the Capacities of our Understandings well consider'd, the Extent of our Knowledge once discover'd, and the Horizon found which sets the Bounds between the Enlightned and the Dark parts of Things, between what is, and what is not comprehensible by us, Men would perhaps with less scruple acquiesce in the avow'd Ignorance of the one, and employ their Thoughts and Discourse with more Advantage and Satisfaction in the other.

THESE are the Sentiments of an Author whom these Gentlemen would have to pass for a *Free-Thinker* ; and so indeed he was, but in a very different sense from theirs. He carried on his Enquiries with all Sobriety and Humility ; ingenuously owning his Ignorance in many things, and thankfully making use of that measure of  
Light

*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 237

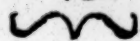
Light which GOD had afforded him. SERM.  
VII.  
Whereas our Modern *Free-Thinkers* are for undertaking all things without distinction, and pretend to know every thing, or nothing at all. There cannot be a more just or severe Reproof than what is given them in this Passage which I have now quoted, nor a truer Description of the Vanity and Absurdity of that *Free-Thinking* which they are so fond of. For while they extend their Enquiries beyond their Capacities, and let their Thoughts wander into those depths where they can find no sure footing, they raise Questions and multiply Disputes which never come to any clear Resolution, and are proper only to continue and encrease their Doubts, and to confirm them at last in perfect Scepticism.

AGAIN: The *Free-Thinkers*, are for rejecting all manner of Guides and Teachers, and will hearken to no Body's Sense but their own. But certainly, to hearken to others, is no hindrance to *Free-Thinking*: Men may make use of Guides and Teachers, and reap a great deal of Benefit from their Instruction, without paying them an implicit Obedience, and receiving every thing for Truth which they shall say,  
and



SERM.

VII.



and never examining any thing, and judging for themselves. No Help can possibly be any Hindrance; and 'tis equally absurd to reject all Guides, and all Direction whatever, as it is to pay a blind Deference and an implicit Obedience to All. *Teaching* was never before thought inconsistent with *Learning*: And as 'tis impossible for any one Man, except a *Free-Thinker*, to be Master of all Arts, and run through the whole Circle of Sciences; so they who have apply'd themselves most to any particular Study, and whose Profession it is, may reasonably be presum'd to be the better skill'd in that particular Science, than those who have never spent so much Time and Thought upon it.

AND tho' none of these Persons are to be absolutely rely'd on, and their Advice implicitly follow'd, where 'tis manifestly wrong, and in Cases so plain, that every one of common Sense is a proper Judge: tho' I would not pledge my Physitian in Poison, if he should declare it never so seriously and solemnly to be good for my Health; nor burn the Evidences of my Estate, tho' my Lawyer should give it me under his Hand that it was the best way

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*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 239

to clear up, and confirm my Title: I say, **S E R M.**  
tho' I would not be led by these Men **VII.**  
into any such Absurdities as these, nor  
follow their Advice where it is plain to  
me that they are in the wrong; yet I  
should reckon it Prudence and no infringement  
of my own Freedom, to be rul'd by  
them in difficult Points, and where I could  
not pretend to understand as much of the  
Matter as they. And even there I would  
use my own Judgment as far as it would  
go; and it would be no small satisfaction  
to me to find it agree in any measure with  
theirs, especially in those Cases where they  
may justly be suppos'd to be better Judges  
than my self. A Man may both Judge  
for himself, and make use of the Judgment  
and Opinion of others: These two are very  
consistent, and so far from destroying, that  
they greatly help one another.

W H A T has been said upon this Head,  
may be apply'd to Divinity: (a) For tho'  
no Man is excluded from that study, any  
more than he is from Law or Physick; and  
a Layman of a liberal Education, who has  
made Divinity his study, may certainly  
know as much of it as any Doctor in Di-

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(a) *Discourse of Free-Thinking*, pag. 107, 108.

SERM.  
VII.

vinity ; as no doubt all *Free-Thinkers* imagine they do, who are daily conversant in every part of Knowledge, and for that reason are not tolerably skill'd in any : yet I believe the *Priests*, whose peculiar business it is to study the Scriptures, and be conversant in the Laws of God, may reasonably be suppos'd to know more of those Matters, than they who are daily taken up with other Employments. And though no Man should blindly follow the *Priests* yet surely, their Assistance ought to be accounted as useful, in Matters relating to their Profession, as that of skilful Persons in any other Faculty, is in things belonging to theirs.

BUT here it is objected, (a) That the Parallel will not hold ; because in Matters of Divinity we cannot act by a Deputy as we may in Law or Physick : Beside which, (b) the worst that can happen by following the Judgment of others in these things, is, that I may lose my Life or Estate ; but if I trust to a Priest who is in the wrong, I am suppos'd to be eternally damn'd.

(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 109.

(b) *Ibid.* pag. 110.



*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 241

To all which, I answer, That it is true, SERM.  
VII.  
that in Matters of Divinity we cannot act by a Deputy. No Man can be sav'd by another Man's Faith, or good Works. Neither can he be Well by the Health of his Physitian, or recover his Right by his Lawyer's Skill, without following their Directions.

BUT if any Man be ignorant of any necessary Point of Faith, or fails in any fundamental Rule of Life, for want of knowing better, when he might have been better inform'd, and knew where to receive Instruction; he will be punish'd for this Ignorance, because it is, in a great measure, wilful, and proceeds from a neglect or contempt of those Means of Knowledge and Instruction which God has provided. And if any Man refuses to follow the Physitian's or the Lawyer's Advice, he will suffer for this neglect, and deservedly reap the fruits of his own Pride and Conceit.

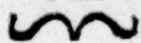
WELL, but the worst that can happen here, is, *that I may lose my Life or Estate; but if I trust to a Priest that is in the wrong, I am suppos'd to be eternally damn'd.* But that is a false Supposition.

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He

SERM.

VII.



He that makes the best use he can of that Reason and Understanding which God has given him, and, where that fails him, has recourse to those standing Means which God has appointed for his further Instruction; if he should be led into an Error, his Error will not be his Ruine, because it is involuntary and unavoidable. If he trusts to a Priest, and asks his Advice, in Cases, which, after due tryal and examination, he finds himself unable to determine, and the Priest happens to be in the wrong, he will not be eternally damn'd; but the Priest will, if he knowingly and wilfully deceives him, and gives him wrong Advice.

Notwithstanding therefore any thing alledg'd to the contrary, the Case is parallel; and we may with as much reason reject all Guides and Teachers, all manner of Instruction and Direction in every thing else as well as Divinity, and think freely for ourselves, without consulting or advising with any, or making use of those Helps and Assistances which are in our Power.

AND what will be the Consequence of this? Why, at this rate, there will be a stop put to all Learning and Knowledge, all Arts and Sciences. For we must not use

*not inconsistent with Free-Thinking.* 243

use any Helps, but lay aside all Books, as S E R M.  
VII.  
well as Men, and think freely for ourselves, and work every thing out of our own Brain. So that all the Improvements which have been made from the beginning of the World, in several parts of Learning, and which of late Years have been very considerable, are of no manner of use or service.

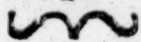
AND in this one thing the *Free-Thinkers* seem to have acted according to their own Principles, and to have made no use of any thing but their own Sense and Reason. For notwithstanding all the progress which has been made in almost every part of Science, they appear to be still in the infancy of Learning, and both write and reason like Men who liv'd in the dark and ignorant Ages of the World.

But yet, after all, tho' they are so much against allowing others to be Guides to them, they would gladly be Guides to others, and fulfil the Proverb, of *the Blind leading the Blind, and both falling into the ditch*. They have a Set of Opinions and Principles, which whosoever does not approve, I doubt they will hardly allow him to be a *Free-Thinker*; and these Principles are not only different from, but contrary to



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VII.



whatever has been hitherto receiv'd. For they tell us, in effect, that we have been all this while in the wrong; that the World has been in an Error from the Beginning, and receiv'd things for true, which, if not false, are at least very doubtful and uncertain. This is what they have plainly insinuated, as to all the fundamental Points both of Natural and Reveal'd Religion. They pretend to be much wiser in these Matters, and to have look'd much farther into them than all that went before them. In short, they do in effect say, it is not prudent or safe for us to be guided by any but themselves. And I doubt not but that all that will come in to *their* Notions and follow *them*, tho' never so blindly and implicitly, will be allow'd by them to be of the number of *Free-Thinkers*. And therefore they advise Men not to be so credulous as their Fore-Fathers, but to require other and stronger Evidence than what has hitherto been acquiesc'd in, as sufficient, by the generality of Mankind. And thus far do they obtrude themselves as Guides to others, peremptorily determining what Evidence is a sufficient ground of Belief, and prescribing how

*not inconsistent with* Free-Thinking. 245

how far, and in what Cases they shall give, or with-hold their Assent.

S E R M.  
VII.

*Fifthly*, T H E Last Rule I laid down as necessary to be observ'd in all our Enquiries after Truth, was, A firm Resolution to embrace the Truth whenever we find it, to yield our selves up to it, and be govern'd by it.

T H E R E cannot be much said upon this Head ; because the main Drift of our Modern *Free-Thinkers* is, to *think* themselves and others *out of* all Truth, and to introduce universal Scepticism. They do not pretend to discover any Truth, but to disprove whatever has been receiv'd for such. Their business is, to cast down the old Foundations, but not to build up any thing new in their room. They frankly (*a*) own, that what they do, is without the least hopes of doing any Good. And here, I believe, they speak the Truth from their Heart.

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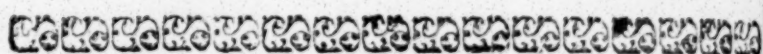
(a) Discourse of *Free-Thinking*, pag. 4.





# SERMON VIII.

*That True Free-Thinking, is  
every Man's Right and  
Duty.*



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things : hold fast  
that which is good.*

SERM.  
VIII.



THE *First* thing which I propos'd from these words, was, To enquire what the Apostle means by *proving all things*; to state the true Notion of that Private Judgment, or Freedom of Thought, which every Man ought to exercise in Religious Matters; and to shew wherein it consists.

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THE *Second* thing I undertook, was, SERM.  
VIII.  
To consider what that *Free-Thinking* is which is Falsely so call'd ; and to shew how much it differs from that in the Text.

AND because I laid down some Rules, under my *First* Head of Discourse, which are necessary to be observ'd by every one who would *Think freely*, and *Reason justly* upon any Subject ; I have examin'd the present *Free-Thinking* by those Rules, and shewn it to be deficient in them all ; and that, instead of being *free-thinking*, it is *thinking* with the *strongest Prejudices* and the *grossest Partiality*. I come now, in the

*Third* place, to shew, That Private Judgment in Matters of Religion, and Free-Thinking properly so call'd, is not only every Man's just Right, and what he cannot be depriv'd of by any Authority whatever ; but that 'tis every Man's Duty, and what we are all indispensably oblig'd to.

As Reason is the principal thing that distinguishes us from other Creatures, and wherein, 'tis evident, we surpass them ; tho' not so much in Reason simply consider'd, as in Reason capable of Religion : so we have certainly a natural Right to employ our Reason in Matters of Religion.

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SERM. This indeed is the true and proper use of  
 VIII. Reason, and for which it was chiefly de-  
 sign'd.

EVERY Man has an undoubted Right to judge for himself in his worldly Affairs, and to pursue such lawful Measures as he thinks most likely to make his Fortunes, and raise himself in the World. He will observe and hearken to others who are reputed skilful and knowing in Matters of this nature; but he will always reserve a liberty to himself of following them no farther than they seem to Act and Think wisely: and where they pursue such Courses, or give such Advice as he imagines would turn to his Prejudice, there he will leave them, and use his own Discretion in making choice of some other way.

AND if Men have such a Right in the Affairs of this Life; if Here they may *prove all things*, and *hold fast that which is good*, that which, in their opinion, makes most for their Well-being in this World: much more ought they to have this Right in Affairs of greater moment, in the Concernments of their Souls and another Life, and chuse for themselves, what they think will make most for their Eternal Well-being.

FOR

FOR Men to lay any Restraint upon one another here, is very unjust, and a great Encroachment upon their Native Liberty. Thus to deprive them of the best use of their Reason and Understanding, is, in effect, to Unman them, and bring them to a level with Beasts which have no Understanding.

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VIII.

EVERY Man is most concern'd for his Salvation, and must therefore be left to himself to judge what he ought to believe and practise, in order to this End: For other Men to interpose here, any other way than by Reason and Argument, Perswasion and Conviction, is to meddle in Things that do not concern them; and unless they were infallible, 'tis at their own peril to force upon others any particular Opinions in Religion. He that will chuse a Religion for me, and will not suffer me to chuse for my self, ought to be punish'd for me too, if I miscarry through his choice.

BUT the thing it self is absurd and impracticable: For when all is said and done, as 'tis highly reasonable Men should judge for themselves, since every Man must bear his own burden, and give an account of himself to GOD; so Men must and will judge



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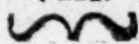
SERM.  
VIII.

judge for themselves in the choice of their Religion.

As no Man ought, so no Man can be depriv'd of this Right of Private Judgment [and *Free-Thinking*] for himself in Religious Matters; we can no more help believing or disbelieving Propositions according to the Light and Evidence in which they appear to us, than we can help seeing external Objects according to their apparent Figure and Magnitude. Such is the nature of Human Understanding, that it cannot be compell'd to the belief of any thing by outward Force and Violence; and as no Man ought, so no Man can, if he would, conform or subject his Faith to the Dictates of another. Another Man may bring me over to his Opinion, by Reasons and Arguments; but then 'tis I that must judge of the Strength of his Reasons and Arguments; and cannot but be of his Opinion, if, after a fair hearing of what he has to say for it, it appears to me to be right, and well grounded. But as to external Force and Compulsion, it can only make Men Hypocrites, and conceal, but not change their Opinions; so that they may profess to believe what in truth they do not believe, and

and this perhaps sometimes when they believe the quite contrary.

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VIII.



BUT farther : — The exercise of this Private Judgment, or the use of our own Reason in Matters of Religion, is every Man's strict Duty, and what we are all of us indispensably oblig'd to. This indeed is the Foundation and Support of all true Religion ; and without it there can be no such thing as true Religion : For as it is evident that none but Rational and Intelligent Creatures are capable of Religion ; so 'tis as evident, there can be no true Religion, but in the use of Reason and Understanding. You may as justly suppose Brutes and Machines to be capable of Religion, as that Men can be truly Religious, without the exercise of their Reason. So that if it be necessary for Men to be truly Religious, 'tis equally necessary for them to make use of their own Reason in the choice of their Religion, and to judge for themselves what Religion is best, what Profession and Worship is most acceptable to G O D.

WHERE Men are destitute of divine Revelation, there 'tis undeniable and unavoidable that they should make use of their own Reason and Judgment,  
which

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SERM. which is the only Rule they have to direct  
VIII. them.

FROM the Consideration of their own Existence, and that of other Things about them, they must collect the Existence of a First Cause, the Eternity of which is inseparable from its Existence; since 'tis self-evident, that if ever there was a Time when there was Nothing, Nothing could ever have been. From those Marks of Goodness and Power, Wisdom and Contrivance, which are every-where conspicuous throughout the Works of the Creation, they must conclude this First Cause to be a Being of Infinite Power and Knowledge, Wisdom and Goodness. From the Consideration of their own Frame and Make, the Relation they bear to GOD, and to one another: from their being rational Creatures, and free Agents, capable of discerning between moral Good and Evil, of chusing the one, and refusing the other: from those Laws which they find imprinted on their Natures, and that inward sense and feeling which they have of Things, they must collect their Obligation to moral Virtues, and judge the practice of them to be the most acceptable Worship of God; and that they cannot  
please



please Him better, than by living in a constant course of Sobriety, Righteousness, and Godliness.

S E R M.  
VIII.

IT were easy to shew how all the great Duties of Natural Religion, and our Obligations to them, might be made out by just and satisfactory Inferences and Deductions from the common and allow'd Principles of Reason; and thus, where there is no divine Revelation, every Man, that desires to have any Religion of his own, must make them out for himself, as far as he is able, by the use of his own Reason. In this case there is no pretence for one Man to impose a Religion upon another: And no such Impositions were ever attempted, but by the pretended Authority of a Revelation.

IF we suppose a Divine Revelation; this is so far from superseding the use of our Reason, that even in this case there can be no true Religion without it. For,

*First*, Revelation does not destroy those Faculties with which we are at present endu'd, or furnish us with any new ones. It only proposes new Objects to those Faculties which we already have, and supplies us with the Knowledge of such Things as we could never have discover'd by the use of those

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SERM.

VIII.

those Faculties. But then this Knowledge cannot contradict that which we have already acquir'd by our Natural Abilities; nor can it be of a different kind: my meaning is, that it must consist of the same Materials with our present Knowledge, and be made up of those Ideas with which our Minds are already furnish'd and acquainted. So that tho' the Propositions, thus convey'd in an extraordinary way of communication, be such as we could not make out by the deductions of Reason, yet they must be such as we are able to understand the meaning of, when they are laid before us, and then readily assent to upon the Credit of the Proposer, and as we are perswaded that they come from God. For whatever extraordinary Impressions a Person inspir'd may receive from the immediate Hand of God, tho' he should have a Revelation made to him consisting of new simple Ideas; he cannot communicate this Revelation to others: it must necessarily rest and terminate in him; because it is impossible, by Words, or any other Signs, to introduce any new simple Ideas into our Minds, or to excite any other than such as lay there before.

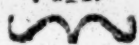
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(a) THUS whatever things were discovered to St. Paul, when he was caught up to the *third Heaven*, whatever new Ideas his Mind there receiv'd; all the description he could make to others of that Place, was only this, that There were *such things as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it enter'd into the heart of man to conceive*. This is all the description he could give of what was communicated to him, a general, negative description: He could not give us any clear determinate notion of it, because it did not consist of any of those Ideas which we receive from Sensation or Reflexion, and therefore did not admit of the ordinary ways of conveying our Conceptions to one another.

WE see then, that even a divine Revelation, especially such as is design'd to be transmitted down for standing use, supposes both the Persons to whom it is first made, and those to whom it is afterwards to be communicated, whether by Word or Writing, to be reasonable Creatures, and leaves them to the use of their natural Faculties. And in all Revelations whatever, there will always be these two things which Reason

S E R M.

VIII.



(a) Vid. *Locke's Essay*, B. 4. c. 48.

must



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SERM. must be the Judge of : 1. the Truth and  
VIII. Reality ; and, 2. the Sense and Meaning  
of the Revelation.

*Secondly*, SINCE all the Life and Power, all the Value and Virtue of our Religion, consists in the inward conviction and full perswasion of the Mind ; 'tis absolutely necessary to exercise our own private Reason and Judgment, in examining the Grounds of our Faith, and the Truth of that Religion we profess.

SUPPOSE we were now to take upon us the Profession of our Religion ; which way would we direct our choice ? should we take our Religion upon trust, and be of that which we first happen to light upon, or which the first Man we meet and discourse with recommends to us ? shall we chuse that which makes most for our present Interest, or suits best with our present Humour and Inclination ? or shall we continue in that Religion wherein we have been bred up, and adhere to that which we find [establish'd] in the Country where Providence has cast our lot ; and all this, without ever examining into it, or endeavouring to give our selves any satisfaction about it ? If we thus owe our Religion to Interest,

Interest, Humour, or Chance ; to the Place of our Nativities, and the common Custom and Practice of the Country we live in : We bring all Religions upon a level, and one is as good for us, and might serve our turn as well as another.

S E R M.  
VIII.



IF any of these be good Reasons for any Religion, they will justify all Religions, even those which are contrary to one another, and therefore they can justify none at all. If common Custom and Practice, if Interest, Education, or the like, be good Reasons why we should be Christians in *Christendom* ; we must, by the same Rule, have been Turks in *Turkey* ; Heathens in the *Indies*, and other Pagan Countries.

IT follows therefore, that if we would be of any Religion, to any good purpose, we must embrace it upon mature Deliberation, and weigh all the Proofs and Arguments which are brought in Defence and Support of it. Our Religion should make its first entrance at our Reason ; or if, as it mostly happens, our Religion was chose for us by those who had the care of our tender Years, we should, as soon as we come to the use of our Reason, ex-

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amine

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VIII.

amine our Religion, and satisfy ourselves about it, and not continue contentedly in it, without being inwardly perswaded of the Truth of it. The Apostle's Rule takes place here, *Whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin.* Whatsoever a Man doth, which he is not fully perswaded in his own Mind to be lawful, is Sin.

THO' we should profess the true Religion, yet if we take it up upon such slight Grounds as these; if we are not satisfy'd about it in our own Minds, and do not make it our own by understanding the Grounds and Reasons of it, and assenting to it upon sufficient Evidence; there will be no safety in following it; it will neither be true to us, nor profitable for us. By such a rash and groundless Belief, we do but offer to God *the sacrifice of Fools*, in which we know he has no pleasure.

WE profess ourselves Christians, and pretend to believe the Truth of the Gospel. History, and the like Divine Authority of the Scriptures. But if we know not why we are Christians, rather than of any other Perswasion; we are so meerly by chance, and might as well have been any thing else.

If



If we believe the Scriptures to be the Word of God, but have no reason for this belief, and can say nothing for it, but only that we *believe* them to be so; we may as well receive *Mahomet's Alchoran*, which pretends no less to Divine Inspiration than They.

S E R M.

VIII.

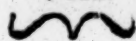
WE see then, that it is absolutely necessary for every Man to use his own Reason and Judgment in the choice of his Religion, in satisfying himself of the Truth and Certainty of it; and that without this, there can be nothing which deserves the Name of Religion. This will further appear in the *Third* place, FROM the Manner wherein Christianity was first propos'd to the World, and the Proofs which accompany'd it.

OUR Blessed Saviour demonstrated Himself to be the Messiah, and the Religion which he came to set up in the World, to be from GOD, by many infallible Proofs: by the Completion of Prophecies relating to the Messiah, and by exactly answering the Character therein given of Him, by working many and great Miracles, more than the World had ever seen before; and particularly by his own Resurrection from the Dead.

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BUT what need was there that He should give us all these Proofs and Evidences of the Truth of his Pretensions, if we our selves ought not to weigh and consider them duly, but might as well be satisfy'd without them? These He often appeals to: But this Appeal would be senseless and insignificant, if they were not design'd for our Conviction, and we were not to use our own Reason in judging whether they were satisfactory.

OUR Saviour has no where encourag'd a rash Belief. When he affirm'd himself to be the Son of God, he would not have us take his naked Affirmation. *If I bare witness of my self, (says He) my witness is not true, John v. 31; and at ver. 36. The Works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same Works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And again, in chap. x. ver. 37, 38. If I do not the Works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the Works. He work'd innumerable Miracles to prove himself to be the Messiah, the Son of God; so many that St. John tells us in a proverbial Expression, that if they should be written every one, even the world*

*itself*

*itself could not contain the Books that should* SERM.  
*be written,* John xxi. 25. *i. e.* they were VIII.  
 so many and various, that it was impossible  
 to keep an exact Account of them.

To which I might add, that our Saviour also appeal'd to his Doctrine, and was, by all candid and unprejudic'd Persons, as much admir'd for the Wisdom with which he spake, as for the Miracles which he wrought. He not only did those Works which no Man ever did, but spake as Man never spoke but He.

THUS was Christianity at first propos'd unto the World: It came back'd with such Proofs and Evidences as were sufficient to convince all who duly consider'd them. And if God thought fit to give us such Arguments for the Truth of our Religion, if he would not have us embrace Christianity but upon good Grounds and Reasons; 'tis certainly our Duty to consider the weight and force of those Arguments which he has given us, that we may come to a thorough Conviction; to enquire into the Grounds of our Faith, and the Reason of our Belief, that we may be fully perswaded and satisfy'd in our own Minds. If God has dealt with us like reasonable Creatures, we ought



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SERM. VIII. to shew ourselves Men, and make use of that Reason and Understanding which he has given us. Since he has not only given us a more perfect Rule of Faith and Manners, than the World ever had before, but has also furnish'd us with such unanswerable Reasons for our Christian Faith and Practice; we ought to acquaint ourselves with them, and should reckon it a shame to have nothing to say for that Religion which God has done so much to establish and confirm.

THE *Text* enjoins us to *prove all things*, and to *hold fast that which is good*: i.e. to try and examine all Opinions and Perswasions, in order to find out that which is worthy to be retain'd, and held fast. Saint Peter exhorts us, *to be ready always to give an answer to every Man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us*, 1 Epistle, ch. iii. 15. That we should be able to give a satisfactory account of our Religion to every one that demands it of us; why, for Instance, we are Christians, rather than of any other Perswasion. And this plainly supposes, both, that there is a reason for our Religion, and that every Man should study this Point so far as to be able to

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assign a good reason why he is of this or that Religion. In many other Cases which concern only ourselves, and our own private Affairs, no Man has a Right to demand of us a Reason of our Actions, nor are we oblig'd to give him any. But Religion being a Matter of such publick and universal Concern, and it being every Man's Duty to set forward the Salvation of his Neighbour; the Apostle seems to intimate, that here every Man has a Right to demand a Reason of our Conduct; and that we are oblig'd to give one: which we cannot do, unless we understand the Grounds and Reasons of our Faith. 'Tis impossible for a Man, who himself has no Reason for his Religion, to give another any Reason for it. We must first understand the Reason of our Religion, before we can explain it to others. St. *John*, in his 1 *Epist.* iv. 1. warns us against a rash implicit Belief. He bids us, *not believe every Spirit*, but make use of our own Understanding, and all other Helps which God has afforded us, to try the spirits whether they are of God; because, (says he) *many false Prophets are gone out into the World*. He does not argue as the *Free-Thinkers* do, that because there are

S 4                      many

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SERM.  
VII.  


many false Prophets, many false Pretenders to Inspiration, that therefore there are no True Prophets, none that are really inspir'd, and sent by God; but because there are so many false Prophets gone out into the World, we must use a great deal of caution that we be not impos'd upon by every crafty and confident Pretender. We must *try the spirits whether they are of God*: Which plainly supposes some to be from God, otherwise it would be in vain to make trial of any, but much better to reject them all at once. 'Tis a noble Commendation which St. Paul gives of the Bereans, for *searching the Scriptures*, i. e. the Writings of the Old Testament, which they had already receiv'd upon unquestionable Authority, *whether those things*, which even he himself, who was certainly inspir'd, had taught, *were so* as he had represented them, *Acts xvii. 11.*

*Fourthly*, THE necessity of using our Reason in Matters of Religion, may be further inferr'd from the true Notion of Faith; which, as contra-distinguish'd from Reason, means and assent of the Mind to such Propositions as we could not make out by Deductions from Reason, but which we assent

to



to as they are reveal'd by God, and ground our Belief of them upon his Veracity.

S E R M.  
VIII.  


THUS much therefore Reason has to do even here : It must judge of the Evidence and Certainty of this Revelation. We assent to whatever is reveal'd by God ; but then we must have some reason to believe any Particular to be so reveal'd. For if we believe it to be a Divine Revelation without any Reason, it is not Faith, but Confidence, or Error, Enthusiasm, or the like.

AND this is a very large Province of Reasons, to judge of all the Proofs which are brought for a Divine Revelation. If any thing be pretended for a Divine Revelation, which is manifestly contrary to Reason, it must be rejected ; because Reason is prior to Revelation, and I can have no greater Proof that any thing comes from God, that any Revelation is Divine, than I have that *That* Proposition, which is plainly contradictory to Reason, is False. The same holds of any thing which contradicts or subverts the Principles and Foundations of Natural Religion : Such a thing cannot be Matter of Divine Revelation, because all Revelation supposes the Truth of the Principles

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S E R M. ciples of Natural Religion ; and these  
 VIII. Principles carry along with them as strong  
 Proofs as can be brought for a Divine Re-  
 velation.

T H U S far therefore it must be left to Reason to judge of any Revelation : It must not only consider the Proofs which are brought for it, whether they be Miracles, the Completion of Prophecies, or the like ; but it must also examine the Matter which it contains, whether that be worthy of God, and consistent with what He has taught us by the Light of Nature. This use of our Reason, Revelation plainly presupposes ; and when are satisfy'd as to these Points, that the Matter suppos'd to be reveal'd, is worthy of God, and that there are sufficient Proofs of its being so reveal'd ; our Faith is so far from excluding Reason, that 'tis nothing else but an assent founded on the highest Reason.

REASON and AUTHORITY here, are not Things inconsistent or repugnant ; for where the Authority is infallible and supreme, as it is in the present case ; there can be no greater Reason in the World, than to believe such an Authority.

FAITH

FAITH is so far from superseding the S E R M.  
 use of Reason, that 'tis Reason it self VIII.  
 grounded upon Testimony ; which Testi-  
 mony is Divine, tho' we have but a Moral  
 Human Certainty that it is so.

WE believe the Scriptures to be the  
 Word of God ; and we assent to whatever  
 is contained in them, upon the Testimony  
 of God. But that the Scriptures are the  
 Word of God, and that we have them come  
 down to us entire and uncorrupt, depends  
 upon Human Testimony ; which Testi-  
 mony we must examine, as we do other  
 Facts, 'till we come to be satisfy'd in our  
 own private Judgments about it. I say,  
 the Scripture it self is not, nor can be  
 own'd for God's Word, but by the Con-  
 sent of God's People, from the Beginning,  
 attesting the Motives of Faith related in  
 the Scripture to have been infallibly  
 done (a). Tho' this Consent amounts to  
 no more than a Moral Evidence, yet that  
 is abundantly sufficient. So that 'tis not  
 enough, to say, we believe thus and thus,  
 because God has so said ; but we must have  
 some Reason for our Belief that God has

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(a) See *Thorndike*, Of Forbearance, pag. 41.



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SERM.  
VIII.

said so ; and that the Book from whence we extract those Propositions which we believe, is the Word of God.

AND then as to the Sense and Meaning of Scripture, this is what every Man must use his own Reason and Judgment in finding out. If I must believe for my self, which is absolutely necessary to my own Salvation ; 'tis equally necessary that I should understand for my self too. (a) For if, with a blind and implicit Faith, I take any Man's Interpretation of Scripture, without examining whether it be the Meaning of the Holy Spirit ; 'tis that Man I believe in, and not in God ; 'tis Human, and not Divine Authority which I rest upon : I embrace what Men say, without knowing what God says, or being at all concern'd about it, and so my *Faith stands* in the fallible *Wisdom of Men*, and not in *the Power and Veracity of God*, 1 Cor. ii. 5. If I make another Man the Authentick Interpreter of Scripture to my self, tho' he understands the Scripture never so well, This will not justify me in making my self his

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(a) See Mr. Locke's Essay for the Understanding St. Paul's Epistles.

Disciple,

Disciple, instead of Christ's. Our Saviour S E R M. VIII.  
 has commanded his Disciples, not to *call*  
*others, or be call'd themselves, Rabbi, or*  
*Master, or Father; for one (says He) is your*  
*Master, even Christ, and all ye are Brethren,*  
 Matt. xxiii. 8, &c. He expressly forbids us  
 to aspire or submit to any such Authority as  
 this. 'Tis certain that such a Faith as this  
 can entitle us to no Reward from God. (a)  
 For he that believes, without having any  
 Reason of his own for believing, may be  
 in love with his own Fancies, or have o-  
 ther Peoples Persons in Admiration; but  
 neither seeks Truth as he ought, nor pays  
 the Obedience due to his Maker, who  
 would have him use those discerning Facul-  
 ties he has given him, to keep him out of  
 Mistake and Error. He that does not this  
 to the best of his Power, however he some-  
 times lights on the Truth, is in the Right  
 but by chance; and I know not whether  
 the Luckiness of the Accident will excuse  
 the Irregularity of the Proceeding. This  
 at least is certain, that he must be account-  
 able for whatever Mistakes he runs into:  
 whereas he that makes use of the Light and

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(a) Locke's Essay, B. 4. c. 17. sect. 24.

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VIII.

Faculties which God has given him, and seeks sincerely to discover Truth, by those Helps and Abilities he has, may have this Satisfaction in doing his Duty as a rational Creature, that though he should miss Truth, he will not miss the Reward of it: for He governs his Assent right, and places it as he should, who in any Case or Matter whatsoever, believes or disbelieves according as Reason directs him. He that does otherwise, transgresses against his own Light, and misuses those Faculties which were given him to no other End but to search and follow the clearer Evidence and greater Probability.

AND this, I hope, may suffice to shew that private Judgement, and *Free-Thinking* properly so call'd, in religious Matters, is not only every Man's just Right, and what he cannot be depriv'd of by any Authority whatever; but, that 'tis every Man's Duty, and what we are all indispensably oblig'd to.

THUS far the *Free-Thinkers* are in the right, and will meet with no opposition from us. This Liberty of private Judgment is one of the common Rights of Mankind; and not only belongs to, but is the Duty of



of every individual Person. But tho' this Liberty of private Judgment be under no Ties or Restraints, no Confinement or Limitation, properly speaking; yet it ought to be under some Government and Regulation, and there are due Cautions to be us'd in the exercise of it.

S E R M.  
VIII.

THIS is what the *Free-Thinkers* have neglected; and upon this Omission, and not upon private Judgment itself, are to be charg'd the ill Consequences which they have drawn from it, and the Mischief which thereby they have endeavour'd to do Religion.

FOR Private Judgment, rightly and duly exercis'd, can never prejudice any good Cause; nor can the True Religion ever suffer by the freest Tryal and Examination. On the contrary, the Inconveniences and Absurdities which arise from suppressing our private Judgment, and declining this fair Tryal, are very great and many, and such as would effectually destroy all True Religion: And the Benefits and Advantages of examining into Religious Matters, and judging for ourselves, are equally many and great; some of which the *Free-Thinkers* have mention'd, but have pass'd

SERM.  
VIII.

pass'd by others which are equally apparent, and would, if attended to, render all the Attempts which they have made upon Religion, under this specious pretence of *Free-Thinking*, vain, and ineffectual.

THESE are Points which I cannot enter upon at present, but must defer 'till another Opportunity.

*The End of the Eighth SERMON,  
preach'd in 1713.*



A COURSE

A  
COURSE  
OF  
SERMONS

Preach'd in the Year 1714.

AT THE  
LECTURE

Founded by the Honourable

ROBERT BOYLE Esq;

---

By the Late Reverend

BENJAMIN IBBOT D. D.

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1 Theff. v. 21. *Prove all things, hold fast  
that which is good.*

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L O N D O N,

Printed for JOHN WYAT, at the *Rose* in St. Paul's  
Church-Yard. MDCCXXVII.





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Prove



every M



## SERMON I.

Of the Cautions necessary to  
be observ'd in the Use of  
private Judgment, or Free-  
thinking.

1 THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which  
is good.*

**I**N my last Discourse upon S E R M.  
these Words I endeavour'd <sup>1.</sup>  
to shew, that private Judg-  
ment in Matters of Reli-  
gion, and *Freethinking*, pro-  
perly so called, is not only  
every Man's just Right, and what he can-  
not

S E R M.

I.

not be depriv'd of by any Authority whatever ; but that 'tis every Man's Duty, and and what we are all indispensably oblig'd to. In this the Freethinkers will meet with no Opposition from us. Christianity not only allows, but enjoins the freest Exercise of our own Reason and Judgment in trying and examining all the Proofs and Evidences, as well as the Doctrines and Articles of our Faith.

BUT tho' this Liberty of private Judgment be under no Ties or Restraints, no Confinement or Limitation from without, yet it ought to be under some Government and Regulation within itself ; and there are due Cautions necessary to be observ'd in the Use and Exercise of it.

WHAT these are, I come now, in the *Fourth Place*, to shew.

I. THIS private Judgment in religious Matters, which belongs to every individual Person, is a Judgment of Discretion, which obliges only the Conscience of him who judges, and whose Authority terminates in himself.

PRIVATE Persons are to judge, but to judge only for themselves, and not to impose their Judgment upon others, or pretend to



any Authority or *Dominion over their* S E R M.

*Faith*: For this is inconsistent with the I.  
Liberty which is essential to this private  
Judgment, which belongs equally to all  
Men whatever, and which therefore no one  
is to assume to himself, or deprive another  
of. Every Man's Opinion is true to himself;  
and if I have a right to impose my Opinions  
upon others because I believe them to be  
true, others have just the same right to im-  
pose theirs upon me, and require me to re-  
ceive them for true: which utterly destroys  
this Liberty of private Judgment.

So that every Man's private Judgment  
can claim no Authority but over himself.  
And tho' the Judgment of a learned Profes-  
sor in Divinity would weigh more with me,  
especially in difficult Points, than the Judg-  
ment of a private Mechanick; and the Judg-  
ment of a whole Council, *ceteris paribus*,  
more than the Judgment of a single Doctor;  
yet still whenever a private Person judges for  
himself, his private Judgment must necessa-  
rily be of the greatest Authority with him,  
because 'tis his own Judgment, and the free  
Determination of his own Mind, because he  
uses his own Reason, and sees with his own

SERM. I. Eyes; and the Opinion of others cannot be of such Weight with him, because he either understands not, or is wholly ignorant of the Grounds of their Opinions. Private Judgment still retains this Authority when it seems to lay it aside, or give it up: For when a private Person, in Cases wherein he does not look upon himself to be a competent Judge, pays any deference to the Judgment of others, whether it be to the Judgment of the Publick, or of any particular Persons; he does this, because in those Cases he judges it best so to do, because he thinks it safe and prudent to follow the Judgment of those whom he looks upon to be wiser and more knowing than himself.

NAY, even they who most oppose this Right of private Judgment, who would either give it up for themselves, or deprive others of it, do at the same time actually make use of it, by giving Reasons why Men should not judge for themselves, of which Reasons the Men themselves must necessarily be the sole Judges. And thus indeed it must needs be, whatever Reasons can be alledg'd against this Liberty of private Judgment, Men must and will be left in the entire Possession of it.

BUT

BUT this private Judgment, must, I say, S E R M.  
I. be confin'd to itself, to determine only what itself shall believe, and not impose it's Conclusions upon others. What the Apostle says of Faith, *i. e.* the Perswasion or Judgment of the Mind in one particular Case, the Case of indifferent things, *Rom. xiv. 22.* may fitly be apply'd to this Matter in general, *Haſt thou Faith, have it to thy ſelf.*—So, whatever our private Judgment is, it must be so far kept to ourselves, that we must not think it has any Power to determine the Judgment of others. The Reasons upon which our Judgment is grounded, may, when offer'd to others convince them also, and bring them over to agree with us in our Judgment; and if our Reasons be satisfactory to them, they are not only oblig'd to be of our Judgment, but they cannot be otherwise. But then this Obligation arises from the Nature of Truth, and not from any Power or Authority which one Man's Judgment has over another's.

If private Judgment be thus confin'd within itself, without affecting any foreign Power or Jurisdiction, all those Objections which are rais'd against it, as if it pleaded not only



S E R M. an Exemption from publick Judgments, but  
 I. a superior Authority to them, will be weak and groundless: For private Judgment claims no Authority but over it self, and denies any such Authority in others, and this very justly; for in Cases where every Man is able to judge for himself (and such are all the necessary Cases in Religion) especially in Matters of Sin and Duty, every Man's private Judgment must be of supreme Authority with himself. In other Cases indeed, which are of a doubtful and difficult Nature, the concurrent Judgment of many great and learned Men must be of great weight with all but those who are so vain as to think themselves wiser than all the World besides.

II. I F private Judgment ought to be thus confin'd within itself, and is in no case to be allow'd to impose it's Conclusions upon others; this Restraint is much more reasonable in those Cases which affect the publick Peace and Happiness of the World, and would subvert the Foundations of Human Society.

A N D therefore if any Man, upon a Pretence of *freely* exercising his own private Reason and Judgment, should make it his Business

Business to advance and propagate such No-  
tions as destroy'd the Foundation of all Re-  
ligion, and were contrary to Piety and a  
good Life; such Principles as were destruc-  
tive of all Laws and Government, as dissolv'd  
all the Bonds and Ties of human Society, and  
ruin'd the publick and just Interests of Bodies  
Politick: This is a manifest Abuse of this  
Liberty, and, as the Apostle expresses it,  
*1 Pet. ii. 16. Using it for a Cloak of Ma-  
liciousness*; and such Persons are to be look'd  
upon as publick Enemies to Mankind, and to  
be treated as such.

OF this sort are Atheists, who deny the  
Being of a God. Bargains and Contracts,  
Oaths and Promises can take no hold of such  
as these: The removing of God out of the  
World, though but even in Thought, dis-  
solves all that Trust and Confidence which  
Men repose in one another, and upon which  
the Comfort and Happiness of human Life  
depends.

SUCH Principles as confound the Distinc-  
tion of moral Good and Evil, and either  
weaken or dissolve our Obligations to a good  
Life: Such as place all Right in external  
Power and Force, and justify any Wicked-  
ness

S E R M. I. ness that is but successful :. Such Principles as these are not to be justify'd or protected under a Pretence of their being the Result of Mens private Judgment, because they manifestly undermine the Foundations of human Society, and are contrary to the common Interest and Happiness of the World.

AGAIN, when Men attempt to mix and blend together religious and civil Rights, Things in their own nature distinct, and entirely different, and affix certain temporal Powers and Privileges to their Religion, and claim them by virtue of those Opinions which they hold ; they abuse this Liberty of private Judgment, which ought to be confin'd to Matters of a purely religious Nature, and not to be extended to the Disturbance of the Civil Rights of Mankind.

THERE are several Prerogatives of this kind which Men have arrogated to themselves upon the score of Orthodoxy in Faith : Such as Dominion being founded in Grace ; the Power of excommunicating and deposing civil Governours ; the Lawfulness of breaking all Promises and Contracts with those who are not in the true Faith. Now if we consider, that every individual Person, and every



every particular Sect, is to itself, and in it's S E R M.  
own Opinion, right and orthodox, truly I.  
pious and faithful; what Confusions and Disturbances would such Opinions as these raise in the World, and how would they embroil the Rights of Princes, and the Liberties of the Subject, and interrupt the Peace and Quiet of human Society?

MEN therefore must keep this private Judgment within it's proper Province: They are to judge for themselves in religious Matters, and must not intermeddle in things of a different nature; nor, under pretence of Religion, indulge such Notions as endanger the civil Rights and Interests of Mankind.

FOR the same reason this Liberty of private Judgment is not to be interpreted, or so understood, as if it exempted Men, in all external Rites and Ceremonies, civil Usages and Customs, from a due Submission and Obedience to their lawful Superiors and Governors, whether in Church or State. No Man should oppose his private Judgment and Opinion to what is publickly appointed and determined, unless upon very full and clear Evidence of the Unlawfulness of such Appointments, and the Erroneousness of such Determinations.

S E R M. terminations. In all other Cases Obedience is  
 I. certainly due for the sake of external Order  
 and Decency, publick Peace and Quiet. The things necessary to this end, are, mostly, of an indifferent Nature, and therefore ought not to be rejected upon every idle Scruple and frivolous Pretence.

T H E S E are some of those Cases where in private Judgment has no Authority, and ought never to be indulg'd in opposition to the Publick. If it should be objected here, that this is a manifest Restraint upon this Liberty of judging, and inconsistent with it; I answer, that if this be a Restraint, it is a very reasonable Restraint, because it is absolutely necessary, and such as every private Man, who judges of things impartially, will consent to.

To which I might further add, that as there is a natural Affinity or Agreement between Truth and our rational Faculties, the one being plainly made for the Discovery and Entertainment of the other; so I believe there are many Truths which all who use their Reason right must agree in, because they are grounded upon such clear and certain Principles. Of this Nature I may rec-

on the Being and Providence of God, the S E R M.  
Difference and Distinction of moral Good I.  
and Evil, and the like ; and therefore the  
Cases which I have mention'd under this  
Head, wherein Men ought not to exercise  
their own private Judgment to the detri-  
ment and disturbance of the Publick, are  
such as will but seldom, and perhaps never,  
happen. But if there be any Men of such  
an odd turn of Head as not to agree in these  
great Points with the rest of the World,  
but after they have exercis'd their own pri-  
vate Judgment with the utmost Impartiality,  
cannot but be of the contrary Opinion, such  
People must keep their Opinions to them-  
selves. They cannot, in this Case, think  
themselves under any obligation to publish  
their Opinions to the World, in order to  
gain Converts ; because they would do more  
mischief than good by such Proceedings.

A Belief of the great Truths of Religion,  
and the consequent Practice of a good Life,  
does plainly make for our present Happiness  
and Comfort, and cannot, upon any Suppo-  
sition, prejudice our future Interest. If the  
Principles of Religion should be false, if  
there be no God, no Life after this, yet  
Men



S E R M. Men gain considerably here by the Belief of  
 I. these things, and a suitable Practice, and cannot possibly lose any thing hereafter. But if the Principles of Religion be true, the Practice of it has still the same good Influence upon the Life which now is, and will infinitely encrease the Happiness of that which is to come.

So that if there should be any found whose Understandings were of such a different Make from the rest of Mankind, that after they had freely exercis'd their own Reason and Judgment, they could not believe Religion to be true ; such Persons, for the sake of the present Interest and Happiness of Mankind, which is evidently promoted by the Belief and Practice of Religion, ought to keep their Discovery to themselves, and not think it so light a Matter to undermine the publick Peace and Quiet, by breaking asunder all the Bonds and Ties of Society, and letting Men loose upon one another.

III. THIS Liberty of private Judgment does not, as I have already observ'd, make all Guides and Teachers in Religion useless and insignificant.

THE Case is the same in Religion as in S E R M.  
other Parts of Knowledge ; some things are I.  
plain, and such as Men of common Capacities may judge of ; other things are more difficult, and which cannot be understood but by much Thought and Study, and which call not only for natural but acquir'd Abilities, and what Men usually mean by Learning : Now as Men are not born Scholars, but must be taught and instructed in many things before they can understand them, so there must be some to teach and instruct them ; and they who have not leisure or capacity for these Studies, must necessarily depend upon the Integrity and Ability of others, if they desire to be satisfy'd in those Points of which no Man is naturally of himself a Judge, but must make himself so by studying and searching into them. This, in such Cases as these, is absolutely necessary and unavoidable, and cannot therefore be reckon'd any Encroachment upon this Liberty of private Judgment.

THAT the Scriptures are the Word of God ; that the several Books of Scripture were wrote by those Persons whose Names they bear ; that they are come down to us,

S E R M. as to all the main Purposes for which they  
 I. were written, entire and uncorrupt : I say  
 these, and such like Points, depend directly  
 and immediately upon such Proofs and Evi-  
 dences as every private Man cannot be sup-  
 pos'd to understand, and must therefore rely  
 upon the Judgment of those who have made  
 these things their Study.

B U T there are good general Arguments  
 indirect and collateral Proofs of the Truth  
 and Authority of Scripture, which are sa-  
 tisfactory in themselves, and of which pri-  
 vate Persons are Judges ; such as arise from  
 the general Testimony and Consent of all  
 Christian People concerning these Books.  
 For they who differ most in their Opinions  
 still own the Scriptures to be the Word of  
 God, and receive the same Books under that  
 Name, tho' they pretend to prove different  
 and sometimes contrary Points out of them.

A G A I N, the Scriptures were wrote in  
 Languages with which the Generality of  
 Mankind are perfectly unacquainted, and  
 which none now can be Masters of without  
 Teaching or Study, and therefore they who  
*occupy the Place of the Unlearned*, cannot  
 pretend, by their own Knowledge, to deter-

mine



to enquire whether the Scriptures be truly translated, but, for this, must depend upon the Judgment of those who have studied and are skill'd in the original Languages.

S E R M.

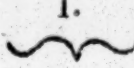
I.

AND yet here again, there is this general Argument of the Truth and Fidelity of the Translations of Scripture, that the different and contending Sects of Christians own their several Translations to be right in the main, and to represent the general Meaning and Sense of the Originals; and where they differ most in their Translations, there is generally most Difficulty and least Importance in the Things, and therefore no Necessity for every private Person to understand the true Meaning of such Places.

So that in both the Cases which I have mentioned, that the Scriptures which we now have are the Word of God, and that they are truly translated, even private Persons may be satisfy'd, from the Consent and Agreement there is as to these Points amongst those who differ widely in other Things, and whom they cannot reasonably suspect to agree in these Points only to deceive and impose upon them: And this, by the way, is one considerable Advantage which private

C

Persons

S E R M. Persons reap from the different Sects and  
 I.  Persuasions there are among the Learned, that they are morally sure that the Scriptures handed down to them, are both entire in themselves, and, in the main, faithfully translated; since if any Sect should attempt any Fraud or Collusion of this kind, they would certainly be detected and expos'd by their Adversaries; whereas should any one Sect prevail over, and swallow up the rest, it would certainly be in their Power, and 'tis greatly to be fear'd they would not want the Will, to new model the Scriptures according to their own Tenets, and make them speak their own Minds instead of that of the Holy Ghost's.

A G A I N, as to the Sense and Meaning of Scripture, tho' the necessary Things are always plain, and lie level to the meanest Understandings; yet there are, as St. Peter tells us, *some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own Destruction*, 2 Pet. iii. 16. This must be own'd to be true, not only of some things in St. Paul's Epistles which St. Peter here speaks of, but of other  
 Point

Points both in the old and new Testament. S E R M.  
I.

And therefore since the understanding these obscure and difficult Parts of holy Scripture depends upon such Knowledge, as many Men have neither the Capacity nor Opportunity of acquiring; 'tis evident, that, in these Cases, we must have Recourse to them whose peculiar Business it is to study the Scriptures, and who may reasonably be suppos'd to be better qualify'd to explain these difficult Places, than the generality of other Men.

It must be own'd indeed, that these Places being confessedly difficult, and therefore not necessary to be understood, there is no Necessity for Guides and Teachers to explain them, because we may be safely ignorant of them. Yet on the other hand it cannot be deny'd, that 'tis every Man's Duty to acquaint himself as perfectly as he can with the Will of God, and to understand as much as he can of his Word: And this is to be understood according to every Man's Abilities and Opportunities. And therefore tho' necessary Points are always to be prefer'd before others, yet since it is not easy to determine absolutely what is in itself necessary, and since Things not in themselves simply

C 2                      necessary



S E R M. necessary may serve to strengthen and en-  
 I. force those that are; no man can safely  
 neglect or refuse any Means of further In-  
 formation and Instruction which are in his  
 power. Ignorance indeed, where 'tis invol-  
 untary and unavoidable will never be im-  
 puted to us for Sin; but where 'tis wilful  
 and malicious, where Men shun the Means  
 of Knowledge, in order to avoid their Ob-  
 ligations to Practice, 'tis certainly criminal.

IN these Cases which I have mentioned,  
 Guides and Teachers are not only useful  
 but necessary; and Men may, without de-  
 parting from their Right of private Judg-  
 ment, nay and ought to make all the use  
 they can of the superior Knowledge of their  
 Guides, in order to inform and enlighten,  
 not to over-rule their own Understandings.  
 I might further add, that in the plainest  
 Cases, in Points of evident Necessity, and  
 where Men may justly be suppos'd ca-  
 pable of judging for themselves, all man-  
 ner of Instruction and Direction is not al-  
 together useless. Some Men are careless and  
 inconsiderate, apt to overlook or mistake  
 the plainest Matters, till they are put in a  
 right Way of thinking. But if there be

not many who want to be thus instructed S E R M.  
in their Duty ; I believe it will be granted, <sup>1.</sup>  
that there are more who want to be re-  
minded of it. And therefore a standing Or-  
der of Men, who should be separated to  
this very Work, and constantly employ'd  
in it, is necessary for the Support and  
Maintenance of Religion in the World,  
and is by Consequence a great Friend to  
the Civil Rights and Interests of Mankind,  
and cannot, without the utmost Violation  
both of Truth and Good Manners, be com-  
plain'd of as \* *a great Charge and Evil to  
Society, and a Burthen never felt on any  
other Occasion.*

IV. Another Caution to be us'd in the  
Exercise of this private Judgment, is to  
employ it chiefly upon such Subjects as  
we are capable of being Masters of.

THO' there be many things wherein  
every private Person is incapable of judg-  
ing, and must have Recourse to others for  
the Solution of his Doubts, and rely upon  
their Determination ; which Cases never  
happen in the Necessaries of Religion, but  
generally in Speculative and less important

\* *Discourse of Freethinking*, pag. 114.

SERM. Points; yet there are many others, namely  
 I. all the great and necessary Points of Religion, wherein he can, and therefore ought to judge for himself, and trust his own Sense and Reason before that of any other Persons whatsoever; because these Things are, by the Light of Nature, and by the Revelation of the Gospel, clearly made known to the Capacities of all Men, as being the Rule by which all Men of all Capacities must finally be judg'd.

EVERY private Person cannot be supposed capable of laying at once, before his own Mind, all the Proofs and Evidences of all the Religions in the World, and examining them severally in Order to choose the true one for himself. But every private Man may judge in general of the Truth of any Religion, from the Nature and Tendency of it, and the Method whereby it was first introduc'd and established in the World.

THUS for Instance, every Man of common Sense may judge that that Religion which teaches unworthy Notions of God, which encourages it's Professors in such Practices as the Light of Nature condemns,



condemns, and enjoins such Things as S E R M.  
right Reason forbids; which is propagated I.  
and kept up by outward Force and Violence, corporal Punishments and Severities, Fire and Sword, Confiscation, Imprisonment, Banishment, and the like; and which has nothing to vouch for it but pretended Miracles, said to have been done in private, and consequently without the Attestation of a sufficient Number of credible Witnesses: I say, any Man of common Sense may reasonably judge for himself, that such a Religion as this could never come from God.

On the contrary, a Religion which teaches worthy Notions and Conceptions of the divine Nature and Attributes, which enforces and improves the Laws and Precepts of natural Religion, and enjoins the Practice of universal Piety and Virtue; which has a manifest Tendency to promote the Comfort and Happiness of human Life; which made its way in the World purely by its own Weight and Force, its Worth and Excellency, intrinsick Reasonableness and native Beauty; without any foreign Aid and Assistance from the Powers then

S E R M. in Being, without any human Authority  
 I. or the Countenance of any such Authority,  
 but in direct Opposition to all this; which  
 had many great and publick Miracles  
 wrought in Confirmation of it; I say, such  
 a Religion has all the Marks and Charac-  
 ters of a divine Original, and must be own'd  
 by every impartial and considering Person  
 to be from God. Such general Proofs and  
 Evidences of the Truth of any Religion,  
 the Generality of Men may understand;  
 and by these Rules they may be able to  
 discern the true Religion from those that  
 are false, and determine their Choice ac-  
 cordingly. If they find that this Character  
 belongs to no other Religion but Chri-  
 stianity, which, without any deep Thought  
 or great Study, will appear to be the Case;  
 this must incline them to Christianity be-  
 fore any other Scheme of Religion what-  
 ever.

AND then, as to the necessary Articles  
 and Doctrines of Christianity, these are so  
 plainly laid down in the New Testament  
 that every private Man, of common Sense  
 and Understanding, may know them. And  
 therefore in these Cases I would trust no  
 Man's

Man's Judgment against my own. If any S E R M.  
Man of the greatest Reputation for Learn- I.  
ing should pretend to deny, or so much as  
to doubt, whether the Scripture affirms  
Jesus to be the Son of God, the Messiah  
that was to come; that he took our Na-  
ture upon him, and became Man; that he  
died for our Sins, and rose again, and as-  
cended into Heaven; and that he will come  
at the last Day to judge both the Quick and  
the Dead: I say, these Points are so plain-  
ly contain'd in the New Testament, that  
I cannot but believe them to be the Doc-  
trines of that Book, whoever should affirm  
the contrary.

IN like manner, if any one should tell  
me that Murder, Adultery, Theft, Lying,  
Perjury, and the like, are lawful and allow-  
able; I could not possibly believe him, be-  
cause my own Reason and Conscience  
plainly tell me that all these are great Sins,  
and they are as plainly forbid and condem-  
ned by our Saviour's Doctrine. In these  
and such like plain and evident Cases, eve-  
ry Man is a competent Judge, and ought  
to judge for himself, and not to be deter-  
min'd by the Judgment of others.



S E R M.

I.

I confess indeed, if we consider Christianity under the different Systems into which different Sects have moulded it, and take a view of the several Questions and Disputes which Men of Letters and Leisure have rais'd about it; few People will be allow'd to be competent Judges of it. But if we look for Christianity in the New Testament, where we shall find it in its utmost Purity and Simplicity, and form our Notions of it from the Discourses of our Saviour and his Apostles, we shall see Cause to wonder whence the many Controversies and Disputes among Christians have arose, and shall hardly persuade ourselves that Religion was at the Bottom. Many times there is little or no Mention made of those Things, which from the Zeal and Earnestness which Men have express'd for them, we should judge to be the Whole or the Main of Religion. Of those Things which are contain'd in Scripture, Men have often been mistaken in their Application, by laying the greatest Stress where the Scripture itself has not laid it. And generally speaking, human Systems have made more Articles of Faith

than

than God himself has exprefly required Men S E R M.  
to believe. For if we confult the New Tef- I.  
tament, and confider what our Saviour has  
made neceffary to be believ'd by every one  
who would become his Difciple; if we con-  
fider what thofe Doctrines of Christianity  
are, which he order'd to be preach'd to all  
the World, to every individual Perfon,  
and made a neceffary Article of every  
Man's explicit Belief: We fhall find them  
both fewer and plainer, than thofe which  
the different Sects of Christians have eſta-  
bliſh'd, and whereby they have diſtin-  
guiſh'd themſelves from each other.

AMONGST this Variety of Sects and  
Contradiction of Opinions, ſome muſt  
neceſſarily be in the wrong, becauſe  
they contradict one another; and it were  
eafy to ſhew that others are in the right,  
and hold nothing but what is agreeable  
to Scripture, which is the only Standard  
by which the Truth or Falſhood of a-  
ny Doctrines is to be try'd. But 'tis  
not my Buſineſs to deſcend to any parti-  
cular Controverſies which are among Chri-  
ſtians, but to defend Christianity in gene-  
ral againſt its common Enemies. And the  
beſt

S E R M. best way to do this, is to take our Notion  
 I. of Christianity directly and immediately  
 from the Scriptures. There we are sure to  
 find it genuine and true; and as it stands  
 there, it is defensible in every Branch: And  
 not only so, but the generality of Man-  
 kind would then be capable of understand-  
 ing it, and might judge for themselves in  
 all the necessary Articles of Faith and  
 Rules of Practice. But as long as Men  
 will give to their own Opinions the Name  
 of Religion; and are so much in Love with  
 their own Fancies, as to make them fun-  
 damental Articles of Faith: As long as  
 Men have built so many Things upon the  
 Foundation, without *taking heed how, or*  
*what they build thereupon*, 1 Cor. iii. 10,  
 11. and yet make little or no Distinction  
 between the Superstructures and the Founda-  
 tion, but press them both as of equal  
 and prime Necessity; 'tis no Wonder that  
 they are able to defend their Opinions no  
 better, and that others understand so little  
 of them.

AND therefore private Persons are not  
 to be debar'd the Liberty of judging for  
 themselves, because they cannot under-  
 stand



Stand every Thing which has been main-  
tain'd under the Name of Religion. This  
is by no means necessary; 'tis sufficient for  
private Men that they understand the plain  
and evident Truths of Christianity, the  
necessary Points of Doctrine and Practice,  
as they are clearly laid down in Scripture.  
These they may certainly be Masters of,  
and should therefore exercise their Judg-  
ment chiefly upon such Subjects.

S E R M.  
I.

V. Tho' every private Person is thus to  
judge for himself in matters of Religion,  
and may arrive to such a Degree of Reli-  
gious Knowledge as is sufficient for his  
own Salvation; yet every private Person  
is not, by virtue of this Liberty of private  
Judgment, to think himself fit to set up  
for a Disputant, and to engage in Contro-  
versies with all who oppose him.

THIS is a Province which more pecu-  
liarly belongs to the Pastors and Gover-  
nours of the Church; 'tis their Duty in-  
deed, but not the Duty of every private  
Man, to be apt to teach, and able to con-  
vince the Gain-fayer; to put to silence the  
Ignorance of the Foolish, and the Confi-  
dence and Subtlety of crafty and designing  
Men.

S E R M. Men. Every Man, 'tis true, is oblig'd, to  
 I. the utmost of his power, to set forward the  
 Salvation of his Neighbour, to instruct the  
 Ignorant, to reclaim the Sinner, and to bring  
 those that are in Error to an Acknowledg-  
 ment of the Truth. But Disputation, as  
 'tis usually manag'd, is an Art which cannot  
 be acquir'd without much Study and long  
 Practice. And he that is not well vers'd and  
 exercis'd in it, which every private Person  
 cannot be suppos'd, nor is oblig'd to be,  
 may, if he be not careful, be baffled in the  
 plainest Truths, and disputed even out of his  
 Senses.

U N L E A R N E D Men may have clear and  
 distinct Perceptions of the Truths which they  
 believe; nay, and may have good Reasons  
 for their Belief, and yet not be able to ex-  
 plain these clearly to the Satisfaction and  
 Conviction of others, much less to answer  
 all the subtle and sophistical Arguments  
 which may be urg'd against them.

T H E Y who apprehend clearly the Mean-  
 ing of those Propositions which they be-  
 lieve, and the Proofs too upon which they  
 are built, may want proper Words to ex-  
 press their Thoughts, and Sagacity to dis-  
 cover

cover the Fallacy of an Argument, as well S E R M.  
as Dexterity and Readiness to answer it. I.  
These are Qualifications which every Man is  
not born with, and which, generally speak-  
ing, must be acquir'd by Labour and Study,  
Reading and Thinking, Discourse and Con-  
versation: Nay, they are not always to be  
found in the most knowing and learned Men.  
They that are most quick in discovering  
Truth, and can readily distinguish it from  
Error and Falshood, are not always able to  
propose it to others with such Strength and  
Clearness as shall convince them: If they  
were, it is not likely that there should be  
so many Disputes among the Learned. But  
this is a Point which I have already spoken  
of more largely in another Place.

It must be confess'd that these are diffe-  
rent Talents which do not always meet in  
the same Persons. And therefore if the  
common People be possess'd of one of these,  
if they can but comprehend the great and  
necessary Truths of Religion, as they are  
contain'd in Scripture, where they lie level  
to the meanest Capacities; 'tis not necessary  
that they should be able to discern the  
Weakness or Fallacy of every Argument  
which



S E R M.

I.

which may be brought against them ; much less to judge of the Issue of long and perplex'd Disputes, which, generally speaking, are about Matters doubtful and uncertain, and consequently not necessary to be determin'd one way or other. And whenever private Persons are press'd with such Objections, against the plainest Truths, as they cannot answer ; this ought not to stagger their Faith, since there is no Cause so plain but may be puzzled by a crafty Adversary : 'Tis sufficient here if they be fully persuaded in their own Minds of the Truth of what they believe, tho' they are not able to persuade or satisfy others. 'Tis for themselves that they are to judge, and not for others. And 'tis Answer enough to any Objections, which are brought against those Truths they once assented to upon good Grounds, to say in the Words of the Apostle, *I know whom I have believ'd, and to hold fast the Form of sound Words in Faith and Love*, 2 Tim. i. 12. and not be *toss'd to and fro, and carried about with every Wind of Doctrine, by the slight of Men, and cunning Craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive* ; Eph. iv. 14.

'Tis

It is the Observation of an excellent Author, That in the Opinions which Men have and firmly stick to, in the World, their Assent is not always from an actual View of the Reasons that at first prevail'd with them: It being in many Cases almost impossible, and in most very hard, even for those who have very admirable Memories, to retain all the Proofs which, upon a due Examination, made them embrace that side of the Question. It suffices that they have once with Care and Fairness sifted the Matter as far as they could, and that they have searched into all the Particulars that they could imagine to give any Light to the Question, and with the best of their Skill cast up the Account upon the whole Evidence: And thus having once found on which side the Probability appear'd to them, after as full and exact an enquiry as they can make, they lay up the Conclusion in their Memories as a Truth they have discover'd; and for the future they remain satisfy'd with the Testimony of their Memories, that this is the Opinion, that by the Proofs they have once seen of it, deserves such a Degree of their Assent as they afford it.

D

ALL

SER. M. <sup>I</sup> ALL which, when apply'd to Religion, isto  
 be understood, not of plain practical Mat-  
 ters, nor of necessary and fundamental Arti-  
 cles of Faith, the Proofs of which are so  
 clear, and come within such a narrow com-  
 pass, that Men may easily carry them in  
 their Minds; but of abstruse and speculative  
 Points, the Proofs of which depend upon  
 abstract Reasonings, or such a long Chain  
 of Inferences and Deductions, as few People  
 are able to retain long in their Minds, much  
 less to have them always actually in their  
 View.

THUS 'tis certain Men do act in the Af-  
 fairs of this Life, and this is all that the  
 greatest Part of Men are capable of doing,  
 in regulating their Opinions and Judgments,  
 nor can I apprehend any Danger from Men  
 acting thus in the Affairs of Religion:  
 I speak now of the Bulk of Mankind, who for  
 want of a liberal Education, cannot manage  
 an Argument to Advantage, though they  
 have the Truth on their Side; and must  
 therefore, without some such Method as this  
 be either very Sceptics, or change every Mo-  
 ment, and yield themselves up to every one  
 who having lately studied the Question, of



fers them Arguments which, for want of S E R M.  
Memory, they are not able presently to an- I.  
swer. I know it may be objected here, That  
at this rate the generality of Mankind must  
continue in their present Persuasions what-  
ever they be : That they who believe an  
Error, must continue in that Error, notwith-  
standing any Arguments which can be urg'd  
to convince them ; and then the Conversion  
of Men to the true Religion will be an im-  
possible and fruitless Undertaking. But this  
Objection supposes what will never be grant-  
ed, because it can never be prov'd, that there  
is as much to be said, and as good Argu-  
ments to be brought for Falshood as for  
Truth ; and that Christianity stands upon  
no better Bottom than the other Religions of  
the World.

FOR since this is not the Case, since  
some things are certainly false, and others  
as certainly true ; tho' Men may sometimes  
be impos'd upon, and for want of duly con-  
sidering and weighing the Arguments that  
are laid before them, may admit that for true  
which is false ; yet where the Arguments are  
fairly propos'd on both Sides, and equally  
and impartially consider'd, Truth, generally  
speaking,

S E R M. speaking, will prevail against Error, and  
 I. Men may be more firmly fix'd in the Belief  
 of Truth, especially in Points of great Moment, which, for the most part, are plainest, than they can be in the Belief of the opposite Error; and in such Cases they should not suffer themselves to be easily mov'd by every little Objection which they cannot immediately answer.

I F any thing be urg'd which seems to be of great weight which is perfectly shocking to the Mind, and makes us uneasy; which we know not well what to say to, and which, if we admit it, overthrows all that we believ'd for true; I cannot see, in such a case, why it should be thought inconsistent with our Liberty of judging for ourselves, to call in the Assistance of others who are better skill'd in the Art of disputing than ourselves, and can easily answer those Objections, and many times to our own Satisfaction, which we ourselves thought unanswerable, till we heard what could be said against them; till their Fallacy or Falseness, Weakness or Inconclusiveness, was discover'd and laid open to us. And if this should happen in a Case wherein we are not competent Judges, we must,

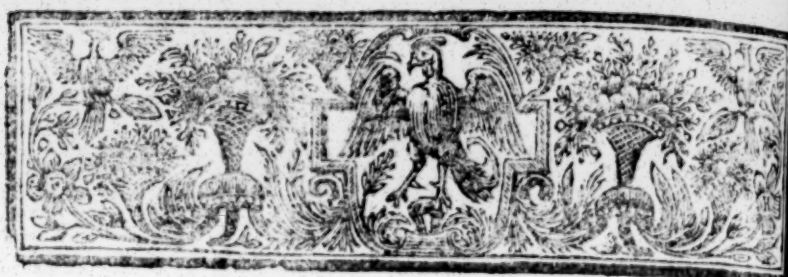
in those Cases which I have already men- S E R M.  
tion'd, rely upon the Judgment of others. I.

THUS I have shewn that this private Judgment, tho' it be free in itself, ought to be under some Government and Regulation; and have laid down some Cautions which are necessary to be observ'd in the Use and Exercise of it.

THERE are several Particulars still behind relating to the present Argument, of which at another Time and Opportunity.

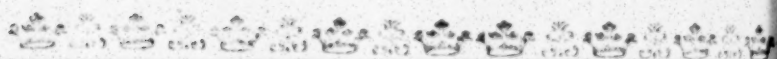






## SERMON II.

The Objections against Private Judgment answer'd.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*

SERMON II.



THE Subject which I have been treating of from these Words, is, That Liberty of private Judgment, or, That Judgment of Discretion, which belongs to every Man, and which every Man ought to exercise in religious Matters,

AND

AND this is a Point which deserves to be S E R M.  
 ly consider'd, because this private Judgment II.  
 ment, when duly exercis'd, is the great Support  
 of true Religion ; but, when misap-  
 ply'd and abus'd, as it has lately been, be-  
 comes very pernicious, tends to the Destruction  
 of all Religion, and the Propagation of  
 Atheism, Scepticism, and Infidelity in the  
 World.

THE last thing which I did, in order to  
 render this private Judgment truly useful  
 and serviceable to Religion, was, laying  
 down some Cautions which ought to be ob-  
 serv'd in the Exercise of it. As,

1. THAT this private Judgment being  
 a Judgment of Discretion, obliges only the  
 Conscience of him who so judges, and should  
 claim no Authority over others.

2. THAT if private Judgment is never  
 to impose its Conclusions upon others, much  
 less ought it to do so in such Cases as affect  
 the publick Peace and Happiness of the  
 World ; I mean in Cases of a civil Nature,  
 and which concern human Society.

3. THAT this private Judgment does not  
 supersede all use of Guides and Teachers,  
 but is very consistent with them, and

SERM. may receive great Improvements from  
 II. them.

4. THAT tho' this private Judgment is, in its own Nature, unlimited, yet it ought chiefly to be employ'd upon such Subjects as we are capable of being Masters of. From whence it follows,

5. THAT tho' every Man may be left to judge for himself in religious Matters, yet every Man ought not, by virtue of this Liberty of private Judgment, to think himself fit to set up for a Disputant, and to engage in Controversies with all who oppose him.

IF Men would use these Cautions, and observe these Rules in the Exercise of their private Judgment, there could be no danger in it, nor could true Religion ever suffer by it. This would obviate or answer most of those Objections which are made against it, and shew the Weakness of those Reasons which are urg'd to deprive Men of it. The most material of these I shall now, in the *Fifth Place*, consider, in order to the further establishing this Right and Liberty of private Judgment.



I. THEN, 'tis objected, That if every S E R M.  
one be left to follow his own private Judg- II.  
ment in Matters of Religion, this will  
encrease and multiply different Opinions and  
different Religions in the World, and give  
rise to many pernicious Errors and Heresies,  
to the Destruction of true Religion.

THEY who are for divesting Men of  
this Liberty of private Judgment, out of  
fear that it would introduce Diversity of  
Opinions, open a Door to Errors and Here-  
sies, and be the Occasion of Mens Defection  
and falling away from the true Religion,  
have a very mean and unworthy Opinion of  
the true Religion : For if there be any dan-  
ger in permitting Men to examine freely, and  
enquire into the Grounds and Foundation of  
the true Religion ; if this Liberty may make  
Men differ from it, or disbelieve it, then it  
should seem that the Consent and Agree-  
ment which there now is among Christians  
in the main and fundamental Points of Chri-  
stianity, is owing to their being debarr'd this  
Liberty, and proceeds from nothing else but  
their not being allow'd to examine into their  
Religion, and to judge of it. Which is just  
such a Commendation of any Religion, as  
it

SERM. II. it is of any suppos'd precious Metal or Stone, that it passes for true and genuin, because it was never suffer'd to be touch'd or brought to any tryal : Or of any manner of Wares, that they are judg'd to be good and excellent in their kind, for no other Reason but because they are always shewn in the dark, and were never seen in a true light. The Credit of things that are false and counterfeit is supported by their being conceal'd and kept at a distance from the Eye ; but things that are true and genuin appear the better for their being look'd into ; the nearer we view them, and the more Light we have to see them, the more we discover of their Beauty and Goodness. And so it is with Religion : Those Religions that are false and spurious, of human Contrivance and Invention, that are the Frauds and Impostures of Men, the more they are examin'd into, the worse they appear, and the more we discover of their Fallacy ; and nothing could keep so many in those Religions but their being kept from examining into them. But true Religion needs none of these Arts. It can never suffer by the strictest Scrutiny and severest

severest Tryal. It loves the Light, and invites Men to take the nicest and the nearest Views of it that are possible. The more narrowly we look into it, the more we shall approve it; the oftner we examine it, the more strongly we shall be confirm'd in our Belief of it; and every new Objection we can start against it, will, in the Solution, furnish us with a new Proof of its Truth.

'Tis a great Commendation of Christianity, to say, That the Reason why so many believe and embrace it, is, because they have examin'd it, and find that it has undeniable Marks and Characters of its coming from God. And herein it differs from *Paganism* and *Mahometanism*; which Religions have so many Followers, because Men are compell'd by force, and kept in Ignorance, and are strictly forbid all manner of search and enquiry into religious Matters. But if the only Reason why so many agree in Christianity, is, because few or none have examin'd it, but most Men take it upon trust one from another; this brings it upon a level with *Pagan* Imposture and Superstition.

I T



S E R M.

II.

It certainly makes much for the Honour of Christianity, that where Men have the greatest Liberty to examine into the Grounds and Reasons of it, and see what Foundation it stands upon, where this is not only permitted as a Privilege, but claim'd and allow'd as a Right, and enjoin'd as a Duty; there should be such Multitudes who are, and continue to be Christians, and who agree in the main and fundamental Articles of their Religion. For as to the Substance of Christianity, the great and capital Points both of Faith and Practice, there is little or no Disagreement among those who judge freely and impartially, among wise and good Men.

BUT let these different Opinions in Religion be what they will; suppose that some Men do, by indulging their own private Judgment, and leaning too much to their own Understandings, fall into damnable Errors and Heresies, of which however other Causes may be assign'd: But, I say, suppose that this were really the Effect of this Liberty of private Judgment, what is the Inference or Consequence to be drawn from hence? That Men should

should therefore be depriv'd of this Liberty of private Judgment, and not be permitted to think freely for themselves in religious Matters, but be oblig'd to believe as the Church believes, to take their Religion upon Trust, and receive all that for Truth which their Guides and Teachers shall think fit to impose upon them? By no means. For, in the first place, this is in the Nature of the Thing impossible; Men cannot, as I have already observ'd, be depriv'd of this Liberty, or debarr'd the Use of it. If they think at all, they must think for themselves. If they believe any Thing, they must believe it upon what they themselves judge to be sufficient Evidence, and cannot be of any Opinion meerly because others are so.

FARTHER; if it were possible to deprive Men of this Right, it is unjust and unreasonable to do so, because it is their Right, and what does, in the strictest Sense belong to them. It is their Birth-right, and we may as justly deprive them of any Thing else which they possess; for this is as much their own, and more so than any other Thing whatever.

BUT

S E R M.  
II.

BUT to this 'tis reply'd, that the Inconveniences arising from the Exercise of this private Judgment, and the Abuses which have been made of it, are sufficient to justify Mens being depriv'd of it. But besides that it might easily be shown, that the Inconveniences of Mens being depriv'd of this Liberty are as great and greater than those which arise from their being allow'd in it: Tho' the Inconveniences were never so many and great on the Side of this Liberty; yet if God has invest-ed Men with this Right, if Reason approves it, and Revelation enjoins it, no accidental Inconveniences can warrant us to give it up, or take it away. Abuses and Inconveniences are not any Argument against the lawful Use of any Thing, nor can ever justify the total Suppression or Removal of that from whence these Abuses and Inconveniences arise.

Do not the greatest Mischiefs and Inconveniences imaginable arise from Mens abusing their natural Liberty as they are free Agents? Is not this the Source of all the Wickedness and Corruption of Mankind? The Spring from whence those Waters flow which imbitter human Life? The fruit-



ful Fountain of all the Sin and Misery S E R M.  
which is in the World? The true Cause of II.  
all that Havock and Confusion which we  
daily see and hear of, and of every evil  
Work that is done under the Sun?

BUT will any one say, that for the  
avoiding these Inconveniences, it were  
good for Men to be depriv'd of their natu-  
ral Liberty, and instead of free, to be made  
necessary Agents, or be fatally determin'd  
in all their Actions? This would be an ef-  
fectual Remedy indeed for all these Evils;  
but such a Remedy as would destroy the  
contrary Good, and be the Disgrace and  
Debasement of human Nature. For then,  
as there would be no such Thing as Vice,  
so there would be no Virtue in the World.  
Men would neither deserve to be blam'd  
or prais'd, and be incapable either of Re-  
wards or Punishments. This would be  
the Consequence of depriving Men of their  
natural Liberty, of the Freedom of their  
Wills; and as bad would be the Conse-  
quence of depriving Men of the free Use of  
their Reason and Judgment in religious  
Matters to prevent Errors and Heresies.

So that we may as well deprive Men of  
the Freedom of their Actions, which would  
destroy

S E R M. destroy all Virtue, as divest them of the Liberty of their Judgment, which would undermine all Religion. Since therefore God has not thought fit to provide an infallible Remedy against Vice and Wickedness, why should we think he has against Errors and Heresies? unless we will say that Errors in Opinion are of a more fatal Consequence than Vices in Practice, and that a wrong Belief is more dangerous than a wicked Life. The Truth of the Matter is, that God has made no more Provision against the one than he has against the other. Men may prevent both if they please; and if they do not, 'tis their own Fault. This is the wise Man's Argument, *Ecclus. xv. 14, &c. God Himself made Man from the Beginning, and left him in the Hand of his Council: If thou wilt, to keep the Commandments, and to perform acceptable Faithfulness. He hath set Fire and Water before thee; stretch forth thy Hand unto whether thou wilt. Before Man is Life and Death, and whether him liketh, shall be given him.*

IN both these Cases God has left Men to the full and free Use of their own Liberty. He has not commanded us, nor put it in our

Power

Power to give up our Reason and Judgment to others. He has invested no Man with a Dominion over another Man's Faith; and therefore 'tis the utmost Arrogance for any Man, or Set of Men, to usurp this Power for the excluding Errors and Heresies, or upon any other Pretence whatever. Nor would this Method help the Matter, or prevent Diversity of Opinions and dangerous Errors in Religion. No Man can be so much concern'd for my Salvation as I am myself; and therefore 'tis not likely that any Man should be so diligent and impartial to instruct me, as I am to inform myself: And if he should, he may be mistaken as well as I; and if I err in following him, I am more inexcusable than I should be if I err'd in following my own private Judgment; because in this Case I have done my duty, and neglected it in the other.

IN a Word, Men will differ from one another in their Opinions, and often run into Errors and Mistakes; nor is there any Remedy against these Inconveniences, unless God should work a perpetual Miracle in preserving any Men, or Succession of Men from Errors, in order to be the infallible

E                      Guides




SER M. Guides and Instructors of others. This is  
 II. what there is no Occasion for; because Men  
 may, by the Use of their own Reason and  
 Judgment, in Conjunction with those other  
 Helps which God has afforded them, come  
 to the Knowledge of all necessary Points  
 in Religion, without an infallible Guide.  
 Nor is there any Reason to think that God  
 has any where set up such a one in his  
 Church, from the imaginary or possible Con-  
 veniences of it. This is a very false Way  
 of arguing. It would, in the Opinion of  
 most Men, be well for the World, if there  
 was an infallible Prescription and Remedy  
 for any, or all Diseases; whoever was en-  
 trusted with the Secret. An infallible Per-  
 son or Persons to decide all Causes relating  
 to Mens civil Rights and Properties, would  
 also be thought of great Use, and to tend  
 very much to the Quiet and Happiness of  
 Mens Lives. But how useful soever both  
 these Things may be, the World ever was,  
 and I believe ever will be, destitute of them  
 both. The Case is the same with Respect  
 to the various Opinions and Disputes,  
 Errors and Heresies in Religion; tho' these  
 proceed from Mens being left to judge for  
 themselves,

Private Judgment *answer'd.*

§ I

themselves, and we should imagine it never so convenient or useful to have them prevented, and to bring all Men to be of the same Mind, and to have right Opinions in every thing; yet this is no Argument that God has order'd Men to restrain their own private Judgments, and to take their Opinions from others, nor any Warrant to any to pretend to this Power of being an infallible and universal Dictator.

S E E M.  
II.  


The Mischiefs and Inconveniencies, which are so much complain'd of, as arising from this Liberty of private Judgment, would by no means be remedy'd if this Liberty was or could be restrain'd, and therefore ought not to be urg'd as an Objection against it. For where this Liberty is deny'd, and endeavour'd to be restrain'd, and a pretended Infallibility set up, there are as many different Opinions and Persuasions, as much Controversy and Dispute, and as plentiful a Crop of Error and Heresy, as where this Liberty is freely exercis'd, and no Opposition is made against it. And 'tis no wonder that a pretended Infallibility cannot do that, which even real Infallibility itself could not. The Apostles had an undoubted claim to this, in

S E R M.  
II.

all those things which God reveal'd to them, and yet we know there were many Disputes and Controversies in their Days, and some among themselves. And if Infallibility was not an effectual Remedy then against these Mischiefs, we have little Reason to think it would prove so now, and much less to imagine that God has actually provided this Remedy. There are no Signs or Marks of it any where in the Christian Church, and least of all there, where 'tis most pretended to. Errors and Heresies, Controversies and Disputes have in all Ages, more or less infested the Church, and will do so to the End of the World, till Christ comes again to translate his Church into Heaven. And therefore since no Man can absolutely secure his Brother from Error; 'tis fit that Men should be allow'd the Liberty of judging for themselves; for then if they should be in an Error, they may recover themselves out of it by thinking better of the Matter, and considering other Arguments which they may meet with: But when this is deny'd them, and they are bid to rely altogether upon others, whatever Errors they shall then fall into are incurable, and they must



must of necessity live and die in them. S E R M.

II.

WE see then that different Opinions in Religion, Errors and Heresies, tho' they should be occasion'd by Mens exercising their own private Judgments, are no Argument against this private Judgment, nor any Reason why Men should be divested of this Right. It appears further that if Men were to give up this Right, and refer themselves to others, upon a suppos'd or real Infallibility, that even this would not prove an effectual Remedy against the Evils complain'd of. And lastly, that God has made no more Provision against Error and Heresy, than he has against Vice and Wickedness; but in both Cases has left Men to the free Use of their own Liberty; of which therefore 'tis unreasonable for Men to debar themselves, or be debarr'd by others. God who can bring Light out of Darkness, and Good out of Evil, permits these things in the World for wise Ends and Purposes. They fall out according to the natural Course of Things, and will certainly follow from that Abuse which Men make of their Liberty, if God does not miraculously interpose to prevent them: But this he does not think fit to do, because they serve some Ends of his Providence

S E R M. dence in the Government of the World.

II.

Hence our Saviour tells us, that *it must needs be that Offences come*; and St. Paul thus addresses himself to the *Corinthians* upon the same Subject, 1 Ep. xi. 19. *For there must be also Heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

II. IT will perhaps be further objected, that if every Man be left to judge for himself in Religious Matters, and to believe nothing but what appears to him to be true: It will follow that there are many things reveal'd by God, and possibly some of these Fundamentals, which many People are not oblig'd to believe.

I have often observ'd already, that the necessary and fundamental Points of Religion are so plainly laid down in Scripture, that if Men be sincerely honest and industrious in studying that Book, they cannot fail of understanding them. If they are impartial in their Enquiries after the Way to Salvation; if they are diligent in using their own Reason and Judgment, together with those other Helps which are in their Power, they will certainly come to the Knowledge of  
whatever

whatever is necessary for them to know in their particular Rank and Station. Whatever, after this, escapes their Knowledge, is for that very Reason not necessary for them to know. For tho' every Particular contain'd in Scripture is undoubtedly true in that Sense wherein God design'd it; yet all Truths in that Book are not simply necessary for all Men to know, and explicitly believe. Whatever is so clearly reveal'd, that I may know it, if it be not my own Fault, I am oblig'd to know and believe, and cannot plead Ignorance in my Excuse. Whatever is not so clearly reveal'd, but that wise and good Men of all Persuasions have differ'd about it; I may safely be ignorant of, and consequently am not oblig'd to believe it in any particular determinate Sense: There are many Truths in Scripture which no Man at present is oblig'd explicitly to believe, because no Man now does certainly know them; and yet there may be good Reasons for their being mention'd there.

THE only general Duty which is incumbent upon all Men in this Case is, not to be negligently, wilfully, or maliciously ignorant of any Part of God's Word. But it does



SER. II. not follow from hence, that every Man is oblig'd to the Study of every Particular contain'd in Scripture. There are many things which few Men have either Leisure or Capacity to study and understand, and some perhaps which none will ever fully comprehend. These are things which Men are not oblig'd to know or to believe but in a general implicit Sense. And if they who have endeavour'd to understand these things should mistake them, and thereby disbelieve some Truths of God; the most that this Disbelief amounts to is involuntary and accidental Ignorance, which, in the present Case, cannot be criminal, because they may with Safety be totally ignorant of what they endeavour to understand; and 'tis impossible that these honest Endeavours should make them guilty of a Sin, from which they had been free, if they had us'd no Endeavours at all.

SINCE then the necessary things are always plain, and such wherein Men, by the Use of common and ordinary Means, may be trusted to judge for themselves; there is no Danger from hence that Men should believe less than God has requir'd of them. But if they are to be determin'd by the Judgment

ment of others, they will be in danger of believing more than God has requir'd of them to believe, and more than is true. S E R M.  
II.

AND yet after all, no Man can properly be said to believe any more than what he himself is able in some measure to judge of, and understand: And therefore if Men cannot, by diligent Attention and Instruction (which is always to be suppos'd) arrive at the Knowledge of those things which are necessary for them to believe; their giving themselves up to the Dictates and Dominion of others will be of no manner of Advantage to them. They may confess with their Mouths what they hear others confess, and what they are told is the true Faith, but they cannot believe it with their Hearts, unless they are in a competent Degree Judges of it.

III. It is further objected, that if every Man is to judge for himself in Religious Matters, and every Man's Religion be true to himself; this brings all Religions upon a Level, and makes any false Religion to be of equal Virtue with the true, wherever that false Religion is believed and embraced.

BUT

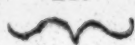
SERM.

II.

BUT this Objection is of no force, because it supposes the Truth of any Religion to depend upon our Opinion and Belief of it; and that whatever Religion we believe must necessarily be true, because we believe it. Whereas the Truth of Religion depends upon the Proofs and Evidences of it, which are in themselves the same, whether we weigh and consider them, or no. If indeed the Proofs and Evidences of all the Religions in the World were of equal Force and Validity, this would bring all Religions upon a Level: But as long as there are more and stronger Proofs of the Truth of Christianity than of any other Religion in the World, Christianity can never be brought upon a Level with other Religions by our believing those Religions as much as we do Christianity.

OUR Opinions do not alter the Nature of Things, and make them true or false, as we believe or disbelieve them. Things are true or false in themselves, antecedently to, and exclusively of our Opinions about them. So that tho' every Man's Religion be true to himself, yet it does not therefore follow that it is true in itself, because



he believes it to be so. He may have S E R M.  
made a wrong Choice, and embrac'd his II.  
Religion before he had duly weighed the   
Proofs of it; which is a good Reason why  
he should examine it carefully before he  
goes on any further in it; but no Reason  
why he should not be left to judge for  
himself of its Truth or Falshood, because,  
as I have already observ'd, there are good  
general Proofs and Arguments of the Truth  
or Falshood of any Religion, which private  
Persons are capable of understanding, and  
whereby they may determine their Choice  
in this Matter, and be convinc'd that all  
Religions are not equal, since, upon Ex-  
amination, it will appear, that there is as  
evident a Difference between some and  
others, as there is between Truth and  
Falshood.

BUT this Objection, of bringing all Re-  
ligions upon a Level, may be more justly  
charg'd upon the contrary Doctrine, that  
Men should not be permitted to chuse  
their Religion for themselves: Because if  
we are to take our Religion from others,  
and embrace that, whatever it be, which  
they shall chuse for us: If we are to be  
of

S E R M. of the Religion of our Fore-fathers, meer-  
 II. ly because it was their Religion; or of the  
 Religion of our Country, purely because it  
 is the Religion which is there publicly  
 profess'd and establish'd; 'tis plain that all  
 Religions are alike and indifferent to us,  
 and the Reason why we are of one Reli-  
 gion rather than another, is not any thing  
 belonging to the Religions themselves, but  
 a Consideration of a foreign Nature, and  
 which has no manner of relation to Reli-  
 gion, and might as well have determin'd  
 us to be of any other Religion, as that  
 which we are of.

Now this certainly is to bring all Re-  
 ligions upon a Level, as far as we are able;  
 and whatever Religion we are thus of,  
 cannot be call'd our own Religion; 'tis the  
 Religion of others, or may be, for ought  
 we know; and any other Religion would  
 have answer'd our purpose as well. Where-  
 as he that chuses a Religion for himself,  
 and chuses according to the best of his  
 Judgment, makes his Religion his own.  
 And tho' this will not make it true, if it  
 be false in itself; yet the Man that is thus  
 involuntarily and unwittingly deceiv'd,  
 may

may reasonably hope, through the Mercy of God, either to be recover'd out of his error, or to be pardon'd and sav'd in it. S E R M.  
II.

IV. IF every Man is to judge for himself in religious Matters, and be left to do what which is right in his own Eyes; it may be objected that this will confound the Distinction of Virtue and Vice, moral Good and Evil, and make way for the most wicked and extravagant things under the Colour and Pretence of Religion.

BUT this Objection, like the former, supposes the Truth and Goodness of things to depend upon our Opinions concerning them; whereas the Nature of things is already fix'd, and immutable, and is one of those Rules by which we ought to govern and direct our Judgment, and then none of these ill Consequences would follow from the freest Use and Exercise of it. In lesser Matters, Men may sometimes mistake the Nature of things, and judge that to be Good which is really Evil. But in great Matters, the Difference between Virtue and Vice, Good and Evil, is so plain and evident that Men cannot but see and know it, and if they be mistaken, their Mistake is



S E R M. is such gross Negligence and Inadvertency,  
 II. or such obstinate Perverseness as no Pretence  
 of private Judgment can excuse.

AG A I N, tho' Men may err in some smaller Matters, and judge those things to be Religion and acceptable to God, which make no Part of Religion, and are in their own Nature indifferent; yet they cannot introduce the Practice of any real Impiety or great Wickedness, upon Pretence of their judging it to be Religion and acceptable to God; because here their Judgment has a plain Rule to go by, the Reason of things, and the reveal'd Will of God, which, if attended to, cannot but secure them against mistaking Acts of Impiety, Cruelty, or Immorality for true Religion.

B U T now if private Persons be debarr'd the Liberty of judging for themselves in these things, and it be left to publick Authority to determine what is Virtue and Vice; what is true Religion and acceptable to God, and what is not so; tho' the real Difference and Distinction between things cannot be destroy'd this Way, yet the Weight of such Authority join'd to the Prohibition of private Judgment, may, as in fact we find it

does

## Private Judgment *answer'd.*

63

does where this is the Case, make Men S E R M.  
mistake Vice for Virtue in the grossest In- II.  
stances, and think that true Religion con-  
sists in the most absurd and ridiculous Ac-  
tions; and not only so, but that it is consistent  
with the most flagrant Impieties and Immo-  
ralities, and that they do God good Service  
by doing all the Mischief they can to Men,  
and treating them with the utmost Cruelty  
and Inhumanity.

V. IT may be further objected, that if  
every private Man be allow'd to be his own  
Judge in religious Matters, this will be the  
Occasion of much Pride, and Conceit, and  
make Men neglect the necessary Means of  
Instruction and Information, upon a Presump-  
tion that they are wise enough of them-  
selves.

THIS is a manifest Abuse of this Liberty  
of private Judgment, and admits of the same  
Answer with the first Objection. Men may  
be proud and conceited upon Account of  
other things besides their Reason and Judg-  
ment, but this will not justify our depriving  
them of those things. 'Tis altogether as  
lawful to plunder every rich Man for fear  
he should be proud, in order to keep him  
humble,

S E R M. humble, as 'tis to debar private Persons the  
 II. Use and Exercise of their own Reason and  
 Judgment, to make them tame and submissive, and keep them in due Obedience to their Superiors.

BUT if Men, in judging for themselves, would observe those Cautions, and keep to those Rules and Measures which have been already laid down, all these Inconveniences would be avoided, and private Judgment would stand clear of all the Objections which are usually rais'd against it. And yet if the Inconveniences arising from this private Judgment, and the Objections against it were never so many and great; this does not at all affect the Merits of the Cause. For if private Judgment in religious Matters be what all Men may justly claim as their Right, and what is enjoin'd all Men as their Duty; the accidental Inconveniences, and the Abuses to which it is liable, are of no manner of Weight, nor can be urg'd as Arguments against it.

NOR, on the other side, are the Benefits and Advantages arising from this private Judgment, tho' never so many and great, any Arguments that Men are invested with



it, and have a right to use it. This depends S E R M.  
upon other Considerations distinct from the II.  
Conveniences or Inconveniences of it. And  
if it appears (which I conceive it does from  
what has been said upon this Subject) that  
private Persons have a Right to judge for  
themselves in religious Matters, it signifies  
nothing whether the Mischiefs or the Bene-  
fits arising from this Liberty of private Judg-  
ment preponderate: For 'tis a Question of  
Right, and not of Conveniency.

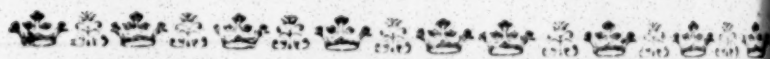
HOWEVER, since I have consider'd the  
Mischiefs that may arise from this Liberty  
of private Judgment, it will not be impro-  
per to take a View of the Benefits and Ad-  
vantages of it; which shall be done in the  
next Discourse.





## SERMON III.

### The Benefits and Advantages of *Private Judgment*.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which  
is good.*

SERM.  
III.



THE last time I spoke to these Words, I made it my Business to consider and answer the most material Objections which are usually urged against that Right and

Liberty of private Judgment in religious Matters which is asserted and enjoined in the Text.

BUT though the Inconveniences arising S E R M.  
from this private Judgment, and the Objec- III.  
tions against it were never so many and  
great, yet this would not at all affect the  
Merits of the Cause. For if private Judg-  
ment in religious Matters be what all Men  
may justly claim as their Right, and what  
is enjoin'd all Men as their Duty; the ac-  
cidental Inconveniences and Abuses to  
which it is liable, are of no manner of  
Weight, nor can be urg'd as Arguments  
against it.

NOR, on the other side, are the Bene-  
fits and Advantages arising from this pri-  
vate Judgment, though never so many and  
great, any Proof that Men are invested  
with it, and have a right to use it. This  
depends upon other Considerations distinct  
from the Conveniences or Inconveniences  
of it.

HOWEVER, since I have before prov'd  
this Right and Duty by direct and posi-  
tive Arguments, and in my last Discourse,  
as to many Objections against it, consider'd  
the Mischiefs that may arise from this Li-  
berty of private Judgment, it will not be  
improper now to take a view of some of  
F 2 the



S E R M. the many Benefits and Advantages of it.  
 III. This would prove the best Remedy against  
 Atheism, Scepticism, and Infidelity.

N E X T to those Prejudices which arise from Mens Lusts and Vices, there is nothing which is a greater Hindrance to the Belief of the Truths of Religion, than want of Consideration and weighing the Proofs and Evidences upon which they are establish'd. We are not born with any actual Knowledge, but only with Capacities for Knowledge. Our Knowledge is all acquir'd by the Use and Improvement of those Powers and Faculties with which God has endu'd us, and is more or less according as Men have more or less improv'd these Talents. Hence we may in great measure account for that surprising Difference which we find amongst Men as to their intellectual Abilities. While some Men who have used their Faculties right and carefully employ'd their Thoughts and Reason, have acquir'd a clear and comprehensive Knowledge of the most difficult things which we are capable of knowing in this imperfect State; there are others who have been lazy and inconsiderate

ate, and never exercis'd their Minds, who know little or nothing at all, in comparison of what they might have known, who doubt of and disbelieve very evident Truths, especially if they be such as they have never taken the Pains to examine and understand.

S E R M.

III.

T H E R E is no Truth more clear and evident, and which Men may sooner make out to themselves, than the Existence of a God ; inasmuch that some have question'd whether there ever was any such Monster in the World as a real Atheist. And yet, I believe, he that shall sit down contented with things, as he finds them in this World, as they minister to his Pleasures and Passions, without ever reflecting upon their Causes, Ends and Contrivances, or enquiring into himself, and considering his own Frame and Make, and pursuing such Thoughts with Diligence and Attention ; may live long without any Notion of such a Being as God, or, at least such a Notion and Belief of him as will Influence his Life and Actions. This is but too evident in many of the meaner Sort of People, whose Lives are spent

S E R M.  
III.

barely in providing the necessary Supports of Life, and all their Time and Thoughts employ'd that Way, tho' they cannot be charg'd with direct Atheism, yet they have many times such gross Notions, such mean, low, and unworthy Conceptions of God, as are next to no Knowledge of him at all. The Lives and Discourses of many others, who, though they are not in these hard Circumstances, yet have made as little Use of their Reason in religious Matters, and been more careful to gratify their Bodies than improve their Minds, give us too much Reason to fear that they have no very strong and clear Impressions of a Deity upon their Understandings, and that they would not be so backward to own this, if all Restraints from Fear and Shame were taken off.

Now this can be ascrib'd to nothing so much as to the want of seriously considering and impartially examining these Matters, and taking the Liberty of freely exercising their own Reason and Judgment. 'Tis observable that Atheism and Irreligion prevail most where there has been the least Cultivation of Nature, and Men have made



the least use of their Reason, where their S<sup>E R M.</sup>  
Minds have never been set on work, and III.  
employ'd in the Invention and Improve-  
ment of Letters and Discipline, Arts and  
Sciences: And even they who have enjoy'd  
these in great Perfection, have yet, for  
want of turning their Thoughts that Way,  
remain'd in great Ignorance of religious  
Matters.

THIS is evident in those Countries  
where Men are forbid all Enquiries of this  
Kind, and prohibited the Use of their Rea-  
son; where 'tis the great Principle of  
Religion, not to *prove all things*, but to  
take all things upon trust; to believe things  
not only without any Ground, but even  
contrary to all Reason and common Sense:  
I say Atheism and Irreligion prevail more  
there, than where Men are permitted and  
encourag'd to make these Enquiries, and  
allow'd the free Use of all possible Means  
of coming to the Knowledge of divine things.  
And such Practices are indulg'd and esta-  
blish'd in those Places as are perfectly in-  
consistent with the Belief of any Religion,  
and can be supported only by down right  
Atheism, and an utter Disbelief of all Re-  
ligion.

S E R M.

III.

So that, upon Enquiry, it will, I believe, be found universally true in fact, that Religion and Atheism prevail in the World in Proportion to the Improvement or Neglect which there is amongst Men of their own private Reason and Judgment.

For tho' a little Thought, and a superficial Enquiry, are not sufficient to establish Men in the Belief of the Truths of Religion; nay, perhaps like a Smattering in Philosophy, may make Men inclin'd to Atheism \*, by starting some Difficulties which they are not able immediately to reconcile; yet where Men make Religion their Study, and go to the Bottom of things; where their Examination is thorough and full, and extends itself to all Points that concern the Question, they will receive entire Satisfaction, and be every Day more and more confirm'd in their Belief of the Principles of Religion.

THERE is so little to be said for the Cause of Atheism, which gives such a poor Account of the Phenomena of Nature, that 'tis impossible for any Man who judges impartially for himself, to be of that Side of

\* *Lord Bacon's Essay.*

the Question. The most celebrated Books S E R M.  
 this Way consist chiefly of bold Strokes of III.  
 Wit, odd and uncommon Turns of  
 Thoughts, and endeavour to expose Re-  
 ligion, and turn it into Ridicule, rather  
 than to confute and disprove it: And when-  
 ever they pretend to reason, 'tis generally  
 in such a way as betrays the Weakness of  
 their Cause, and their want of good Ar-  
 guments to support it.

W H A T E V E R Difficulties have been  
 rais'd against the Principles of Religion,  
 besides that the Difficulties on the other  
 side are manifestly more and greater, have  
 little or nothing in them, when they come  
 to be examin'd, and cannot have any  
 Weight but with weak and unthinking  
 People. The Objections, for the most part,  
 are, as has been already observ'd, such as  
 are common to Religion with other things.  
 So that either there are no such things as  
 Truth and Certainty, or Religion has as  
 good a Pretence to them as any thing else.  
 This will appear to any one who will but  
 make the same use of his Reason in Reli-  
 gion, as he does in other Matters, and go  
 over in his Mind the several Proofs of it,  
 and



S E R M.

III.

will not do this, if they will take things upon trust from others, and have Mens Names and Persons in Admiration upon account of their reputed Wit and Parts, and greedily hearken to their Objections, without ever examining whether they be well or ill grounded; they may set up for Infidelity, and come at last, for want of Thought and Consideration, to be confirm'd in it. And this Method is usually follow'd by those who cast off the Principles of Religion, and turn, in pretence at least, and to outward Appearance, Infidels and Atheists. They take their impious Opinions from their several Masters and Leaders upon content, and do not unravel their Schemes, and sift and examine them to the Bottom, in order to see what Foundation and Support they have in Reason. If Men would do this; if they would carefully examine those Points which 'tis their Duty to examine and understand themselves, and not blindly with an implicit Faith to take from others, they could never swallow those Difficulties which the Atheists Hypothesis is clog'd with.

A brief View of the common Principles of Atheism will suffice to show the Absurdity of it. E R M.  
III.

THAT the World was from all Eternity, and that there has been an infinite Series and Succession of Causes and Effects. Or that the World was made by the fortuitous concourse and lucky jumbling of innumerable Atoms and infinitely small Parts of Matter, which happen'd to light upon one another, and after innumerable Tryals, to compose this beautiful System. That as the World was at first made by Chance, so it still subsists, and is govern'd by it. That Man himself is the Creature of blind Chance, and sprung up at first like a Mushroom. That Matter is endu'd with a Power of Thought, and a Principle of Self motion. That we are nothing else but meer Mechanism, and necessarily determin'd in all our Thoughts and Actions. That there is no moral Difference in things, neither Good or Evil in any of our Actions. That when this Body is dissolv'd, our Being is at an End; and there is no Account to be given of our present Carriage and Behaviour, nor any future State of Rewards or Punishments.

THESE

SERM.  
III.

THESE and such like are the Tenets and Principles of Atheism. But can any Man swallow any or all of these, who will but examine things himself, and not be led away by the Name and Authority of others? Would not every considering Man quickly discover the contrary Scheme to be more consistent and better grounded? There are such visible Marks of extraordinary Wisdom and Power in all the Works of the Creation, that a rational Creature, who will but seriously reflect on them, cannot miss the Discovery of a Deity, who made the World and all that is therein. And he must be a very careless Spectator of human Affairs, and live without making any Observations upon what he sees and hears of every Day, who cannot discern sufficient Proofs of the World's being govern'd by the same Wisdom and Power which first made it. Whoever contemplates the wonderful Frame and Make of his Body, or turns his Eyes inwardly upon himself, and reflects upon the Springs and Motions of his own Actions, can never believe himself to be a Piece of Clock-work or meer Mechanism, but will soon be convinc'd that he is a free Agent, endued with



with a Principle of Self-Motion and Deter-  
mination, and consequently that he is an ac-  
countable Creature, and capable of Reward  
or Punishment. And this the Judgment  
which he himself passes, and cannot help  
passing upon the Pravity or Rectitude of his  
own Actions will farther evince.

S E R M.

III.

'Tis needless to go through all these Par-  
ticulars; they may safely be trusted to the  
sober Reason and common Sense of Man-  
kind. The more Men exercise their own  
private Judgment, and think for themselves,  
the further will they be remov'd from Scep-  
ticism and Infidelity, and the more firmly  
will they be perswaded of the Truth and  
Reasonableness of all the Principles of na-  
tural Religion.

REVEAL'D Religion will also gain the  
more Credit and Belief the more we ex-  
amine and consider it. For though this was  
more than we could justly expect after God  
had made sufficient Provision for our know-  
ing and obeying his Will in the Principles  
of our Creation, by that Reason and Under-  
standing which he had given us; yet since  
human Nature was degenerated and corrupt-  
ed, and our Faculties, in Tract of Time, and  
through

S E R M.

III.

not help, were weakned and disorder'd, since some Men want Leisure, others Abilities, and most Inclination to find out their Duty, and enforce it upon themselves from the Principles of Reason: It must be own'd highly agreeable to the divine Goodness and a becoming Instance of Clemency and Compassion in the common Father and Parent of Mankind not to leave us in this State of Darknes and Blindness, but to vouchsafe such frail Creatures some other Light and Admonisher, and to superadd to natural Reason some farther Assistance and Encouragement to know and obey his holy Will. That such a Revelation as this is possible, cannot be deny'd. And none who considers not only the great Usefulness and Advantage of it, but the Necessity there was for it, can say that it was needless and superfluous. And that God made such a Revelation of his Will *to the Fathers by the Prophets* and *to us by his Son*, has been already prov'd.

IF we consider the Christian Revelation in particular, it will appear, in every Branch of it, highly reasonable, and becoming the

Wisdom

Wisdom and Goodness of God. Nothing S E R M.  
could be conceiv'd or contriv'd more proper III.  
or likely to promote Piety and Holiness in  
the World. The Truth of this Revelation  
depends upon such Proofs as must needs sa-  
tisfy every inquisitive Man. Our Saviour's  
Miracles were an undeniable Argument of  
his divine Mission; and these were so many  
and publick that they cannot be question'd.  
The Persons whom he employ'd to spread  
this Revelation in the World, were of all  
Men the most unfit, and the worst qualified  
to have done it, if it had been an Imposture.  
Tis evident from their whole Carriage and  
Behaviour that they themselves believ'd the  
Truth of it; and they could never have  
prevail'd with others to receive it, if they  
had not been miraculously assisted to bear  
testimony to it, and give the World the most  
convincing Proofs of its Truth.

THESE, I know, are very common and  
obvious Reflections, but sufficient to shew  
that if Men would consult their own impar-  
tial Reason and unbiass'd Judgment; if they  
would examine things for themselves, and  
see with their own Eyes, they could not  
disbelieve the Principles either of natural or  
reveal'd



S E R M. reveal'd Religion: They could not be Atheists or Infidels; nay, they could not but be Christians, if that Religion was fairly propos'd to them, and calmly consider'd by them.

III. If there be any who do not believe these things, or who directly disbelieve them 'tis because they have not made any proof or tryal of them, or have done this in a very partial and superficial manner. They have not been accusom'd to use their own Thoughts and Reason, but have blindly follow'd the Dictates of some whom they have more particularly admir'd. Or perhaps they are such as affect Novelty and Singularity, and will not believe as the generality of the World believes, tho' there be never so good Grounds for it, purely because it is the general Belief: Or are hinder'd by some prevailing Lust or Passion from exercising their Reason in religious Matters, and dare not examine things strictly for fear they should come to the Knowledge and Belief of the Truth.

II. Constancy and Stedfastness in the Profession of the true Religion is another Advantage of the Exercise of this private Judgment

ment in examining into the Grounds and Reasons of our Faith. S E R M.  
III.

HE that takes up his Religion in a careless inconsiderate Manner, with little or no Reason, and upon light Grounds, will part with it again as lightly, and with as little Reason as he at first embrac'd it. If I am of any particular Religion because it is my Interest to be so; whenever it proves to be my Interest to part with this Religion, and embrace another different from it, or contrary to it, I shall certainly do so. If I am of any Religion, only because 'tis the general Religion of my Country; I shall change my Religion with my Country, and be of different Persuasions at different Times, and in different Places. If I profess any Religion, because such a one, as I have a great Opinion of, has told me that that is the true Religion; if I meet with another Person, for whose Judgment I have an equal or greater Value, who recommends to me a different Way of Worship; I shall be tempted to renounce my own Way, and take up with this.

IN these and all other Cases where Mens Religion is not their own proper Choice,

G

and

S E R M.

III.

and the Result of their own Reason and Judgment, they will be fickle and inconstant in the Profession of it. Our Saviour has no hold of such Disciples as these, nor can any such be secure of themselves. We are prepar'd for any thing at this rate, and shall be given to change upon every turn, and *carried away with every new Wind of Doctrine.*

AND therefore if we would hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering, we must search into the Grounds and Foundation of it, till we are thoroughly perswaded and satisfy'd about it. We must *prove all things* before we can know *that which is good*; and when we know it, we shall never have any *fast hold* of it, till we have try'd and examin'd it to the Bottom, and find it worth our retaining, and what we cannot part with but to our Loss.

HE that is a Christian upon these Grounds, upon a full Conviction of the Truth of Christianity, will be so, not for some few Months, or Years only, but for his whole Life: not in some Countries only where this Religion is profess'd, but

wherever



wherever he comes, in whatsoever Part of S E R M.  
the World Providence shall cast him; and III.  
will be so far from being tempted to alter  
his Belief, or renounce the Profession of it,  
that his Belief will be Proof against all  
Temptations, and he will do any thing  
rather than forego his Christian Hopes and  
Expectations, and suffer any thing rather  
than forfeit or come short of that Glory  
which shall be reveal'd. This is the Man  
that will abide in the Day of Trial, and  
hold out unto the End, whose Religion ei-  
ther made its first Entrance into him by  
his Reason, or was afterwards approv'd  
and confirm'd by it, and does not sit loose  
upon him, but is rivetted in him by the  
most convincing Reasons and Arguments,  
is firmly seated in his Understanding, and  
lies at his Heart, and is become as it were  
a Part of himself.

BUT the Man, whose Religion is not  
rooted in his Understanding, who knows  
not what he pretends to believe, nor can  
give any Reason why he should believe it;  
who has never taken the pains to examine  
into his Religion, and understands little or  
nothing of it; will neither do nor suffer

S E R M. much for the sake of it, but is ready pro  
 III. par'd to part with it, whenever the Profe  
 sion of it is likely to bring any Trouble or  
 Difficulty upon him.

S U C H a Christian as this is very fitly  
 compar'd, in the Parable, to him that re  
 ceiv'd the Seed into stony Places: *The same*  
*is he that beareth the Word, and receiveth it*  
*with Joy receiveth it; yet hath he no*  
*Root in himself, but dureth for a while*  
*for when Tribulation or Persecution ariseth*  
*because of the Word, by and by he is*  
*offended; Matt. xiii. 20, 21.* Our Reli  
 gion can have no root in us, nor any hold  
 upon us but by our Reason and Judgment.  
 If we have no Reason for it, if we do not  
 understand it, and are not inwardly con  
 vinc'd of its Truth and Excellency, we shall  
 quickly let it go whenever it becomes un  
 easy to us.

A N D therefore if it be our Duty to be  
 constant and stedfast in the Profession of  
 Christianity; if we are oblig'd to hold fast  
 in opposition to all the Temptations  
 and Allurements to Sin, and not only so  
 but readily to suffer any Persecution and  
 Torment, and undergo even Death itself

if there be Occasion, and God's Providence S E R M.  
III.  
should call us to it, rather than renounce  
or deny it; 'tis absolutely necessary that  
we should be fully persuaded in our own  
Minds of the Truth of our Religion: For  
if we do not see sufficient Reason to be-  
lieve it, 'tis impossible that we should have  
sufficient Reason to suffer for the sake of  
it, and very unlikely that we should do so  
whenever it comes to the Trial. And if  
any Man should be so far influenc'd by  
the Example of others, as to suffer because  
they do, without knowing why, or under-  
standing the Worth of that for which he  
suffers, he suffers not according to the  
Will of God, but according to his own ob-  
stinate and perverse Humour; he suffers as  
a Fool, and not as a Christian, and has  
reason to be ashamed, because *God is not  
glorified on this Behalf*; 1 Pet. iv. 16.

Thus to suffer, without knowing whe-  
ther that be true or false for which we  
suffer, is just such an Instance of Obedience,  
as it is of Faith to believe any Thing be-  
cause it is impossible, which, as it may  
pass, in a good Man, for a Sally of Zeal,  
but would prove a very ill Rule for Men



SERM. to chuse their Opinions or Religion by  
 III. so thus to suffer, whatever Rashness or  
 Boldness there may be in it, argues but  
 little true Courage and Wisdom, and has  
 as little true Virtue and Religion in it,  
 and would prove but an ill Rule for di-  
 recting our Practice.

It remains therefore, that if Men ought  
 to be stedfast and constant in the Profession  
 of the true Faith, and to keep it notwith-  
 standing any Temptations or Sufferings  
 they may meet with; if they ought, when-  
 ever there is Occasion, to *endure Grief and*  
*justly* ~~justly~~ *wrongfully* for Conscience towards  
 God, and expect any Reward for such  
 Sufferings: 'tis necessary that they should  
 judge for themselves of the Truth of the  
 Religion, and be satisfy'd concerning it by  
 their own Reason and Understanding, be-  
 cause such Stedfastness and Constancy  
 this can proceed only from Mens own  
 private Judgment and Persuasion, and may  
 justly be reckon'd a great Advantage of the  
 Exercise of this private Judgment.

III. Another great Advantage arising  
 from the free Exercise of our own private  
 Judgment in Matters of Religion, is, that

lays a Foundation for the Practice of mutual SE R M.  
Charity and Forbearance. III.

I have already shewn in what Cases Men are not to be tolerated or born with, unless they keep their Opinions to themselves; *viz.* when their Opinions are such as overthrow the Foundation of all Religion, and consequently affect the Civil Rights and Interests of Mankind, and disturb the good Order and Government of the World. In all other Cases, in Matters which belong solely to Religion, and reach no farther, whether they be Points of meer Speculation, or such as influence our Practice; since every Man's private Judgment is to direct none but himself; this pleads strongly for the Maintenance of Peace, and the common Offices of Friendship, amidst the greatest Diversity of Opinions. For since every Man's Opinion is suppos'd to be the Result of his own private Reason and Judgment, and every Man has a Right to the free Exercise of his own Reason and Judgment in order to form his Opinions; 'tis unreasonable to expect that other Men should obsequiously quit their own Opinions, and em-

SERM.  
III.

brace ours; that they should readily forsake their own Reason and Judgment, and blindly resign themselves to be determined by us. This is such an Authority as the Mind of Man can never acknowledge or submit to: For tho' it often mistakes for want of duly considering, it can own no other Guide but its own Reason and Understanding. I speak now upon a Supposition of that Right of private Judgment which I have prov'd every Man invested with, and that Men do actually make use of this Right in judging for themselves.

Now if he whom I would bring over to my Opinions, cannot, upon a due and impartial Examination of them, find sufficient Grounds to believe them; or if he is already so well satisfy'd of the Truth of his own Opinions, that he cannot think it worth while to be at the Pains of a new Examination; we have no Reason to be angry with him for any thing of this kind or to take it ill: For this is no more than what we our selves often do in the same Cases. We like our own Opinions so well that we do not care to change them for those of every other Man we discourse with



who differs from us; nor do we love to have others prescribe to us what Points we shall study. Every Man desires to be at Liberty in these things, and should therefore be as willing to indulge the same Liberty to others. If we ourselves are loath to relinquish those Tenets which we have embrac'd upon due Examination, and, as we think, full Evidence of their Truth; or which Time and Custom have so settled and rivetted in our Minds, that we believe them to be self-evident, and of unquestionable Authority, and cannot part with them upon any Consideration; how can we expect this from others? And if we be angry with them upon this Score, have not they just as much Reason to be angry with us? For every Man's Opinions are true to himself, and all Men are naturally dispos'd to think well of themselves and their own Understandings. And if every Man should immediately declare Enmity, and commence War against those who differ'd from him in Opinion, what Feuds and Quarrels, what Contentions and Animosities would this raise in the World?

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III.

SINCE

S E R M.

III.

Since then every Man has an undoubted Right to judge for himself in religious Matters, and 'tis every Man's Duty to follow the Dictates of his own Judgment; and since there is a good Agreement between all honest and good Men in the great and Fundamental Points of Religion, we ought to bear with one another in our Differences about lesser Matters. Instead of treating one another ill upon any such Account as this, and looking upon all those who differ from us as if they were of a different Religion, and dealing with them as with *Jews* and *Turks*, Heathens and Infidels; it would much better become us, and be more for the Advantage of common Christianity, to commiserate our mutual Ignorance, and endeavour to remove it by all the gentle and peaceable Methods of Reason and Persuasion.

WE are apt indeed to imagine that we have so much Evidence for the Truth of our own Opinions, that it must be downright Obstinacy and Perverseness in others not to embrace them. But have not others just the same reason to think thus of us? they have an equal Liberty of judging for themselves. And they, 'tis probable, think they have

have form'd their Judgment upon such sufficient and evident Grounds, that 'tis Obstinacy in us not to be of their Minds: What then is to be done in this Case? Why, the most natural Conclusion and reasonable Consequence seems to be, that every Man should leave his Neighbour, and be left himself to the private Persuasion of his own Mind, and that Liberty of Judgment wherewith God has made him free.

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III.

FARTHER, if we consider and observe the infinite Deceptions and Causes of Deceptions which take place in all doubtful Questions, and which the wisest Men are not perfectly free from; if we reflect how short and imperfect our best Reason is, and how few Men have the Leisure, Patience, and Means of improving this Reason to the best Advantage in this fleeting State of Action and Blindness wherein at present we subsist; if we observe what Obscurity and Uncertainty there is many times in things themselves, and what a Cloud and Darkness rests upon our Understandings: I say, who-soever considers these and such like Particulars, which are obvious to all who consider any thing of the Matter, will soon be convinced,



S E R M. vinc'd, that the strongest Understanding can-  
 III. not pretend to such an Exemption and Im-  
 munity from the common Condition of Men,  
 as not to feel and confess its Weakness, and  
 own itself liable to Errors. The wisest Man  
 will, upon these accounts, find cause to sus-  
 pect that he may sometimes be deceiv'd, and  
 mistake Confidence for Certainty, and will  
 not therefore be forward in obtruding his  
 Opinions upon others, and immediately fall  
 out with all who will not receive them.

How few are there who have fully dis-  
 charg'd the Duty in the Text, of *proving*  
*all things* ; who have truly and fairly exa-  
 min'd all their own Opinions which they be-  
 lieve, and by which they govern themselves ;  
 who have gone to the Bottom of all their  
 own Tenets, and have gone past all doubt  
 concerning their Truth and Certainty ? Is it  
 not, on the contrary, very common for Men  
 to take their Opinions upon Trust, or upon  
 very slight and superficial Examination ?  
 And how many think themselves in the right  
 for no other Reason but because they think  
 so, and never thought otherwise ; and be-  
 lieve their own Opinions to be true because  
 they never question'd them, or brought them

to the Trial? And how unfit are such as S E R M.  
these to prescribe to others? III.

EVEN they who have carefully examin'd their own Opinions, cannot, in every Case, be secure that they have had all the Particulars before them which concern the Question in Hand: That there are no latent Proofs undiscover'd, no Evidence behind, and, as yet, unseen, which may bring their present Knowledge in doubt again, and cast the Probability on the other side, and outweigh all that before seem'd to preponderate with them. And if this be, as I question not but it often is, the Case, we should be as willing to learn of others as to dictate to them, and should never be for imposing and obtruding our Opinions upon them as so many incontestable Truths. Since all Men are to be allow'd the free Use of their own Reason and Judgment in their Enquiries after Truth, the same Question may be consider'd by different Persons in different Views, and what some Men have quite overlook'd, others may have consider'd and observ'd; which is a good Reason why Men should debate the Matter with Candour and Fairness for mutual Instruction and Information, and not any one

S E R M. one magisterially dictate or tamely submit to  
 III. another.

To this I might add, that altho' there are many Truths which all Men, who use their Reason right, will agree in; yet all Men are not able to discover these Truths, and to draw out all the Consequences of them, or to understand them when they are discover'd and drawn out. There are other Truths which are not so plain as to be apprehended by every Man, and about which Mens Reason differs as much as their Taste, which tho' it agrees in great and plain Matters, yet where there is any Niceness or Difficulty, it represents the same thing differently to different Persons.

SOME Mens Understandings are of a peculiar Cast and Make, of a different Constitution and Ability from others. And if we consider the Quickness and Pregnancy of some Mens Parts over others, the different Ways in which they have been brought up, the various Notions and Principles they have imbib'd, the different Methods of thinking and reasoning they have been us'd to, the many Prejudices which they labour under, and these too not of any vicious kind, or



from any vicious Cause ; if we consider these S E R M. III.  
 things, we shall not be so forward to call  
 every Opinion a self-evident Truth : for, up-  
 on these Accounts, that may be plain and  
 evident to one Man which is very difficult  
 and obscure to another ; and what some  
 Men take to be Demonstration, others, per-  
 haps, will not allow to be more than pro-  
 bable.

I speak not now of plain, necessary, and  
 fundamental Points, these I suppose all wise  
 and good Men to be agreed in ; but of Mat-  
 ters unnecessary, and of a doubtful and dis-  
 putable Nature. In such Cases Reason will  
 proceed differently, and come to different  
 Conclusions in different Persons ; and Men  
 may as justly quarrel with one another be-  
 cause they are not all of the same Stature  
 and Complexion, because they do not all  
 speak and look alike, as well as because they  
 do not all think, and reason, and believe  
 alike ; since the one, in many Cases, is as  
 much out of their power as the other.

THUS it is, and will be as long as  
 Men are left to the Use of their own  
 Reason and Judgment in religious Matters,  
 They will reason and judge differently,  
 and

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III.

and come to different Conclusions; and ought therefore to bear with one another in this Difference, and maintain Peace, and Humanity, and Friendship amidst this Variety of Opinions.

IF we have recourse to the Scriptures for the Solution of our Doubts, and consider that, in Matters not necessary, there are many things hard to be understood, full of deep Mysteries, the hidden things of God, involved in Clouds and Darknes, veil'd with Shadows and Allusions, heighthned with lofty Metaphors and Expressions, cloth'd and cover'd with Variety of Figures and Ornaments of Speech; that multitude of Comments have been writ upon them, and very different Senses and Interpretations given of those obscure Places; we shall be inclin'd to think that God hereby design'd to make trial of our Industry, and to teach us Humility; to humble the Wise in their own Conceits, the Disputers of this World, and make them sensible of their Ignorance and Imperfections; and to furnish us all with Occasions and Opportunities of mutual Charity and Forbearance, and keep us from being dogmatical in imposing upon others.

in Matters so dubious and difficult.

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III.

THIS is the proper use we should make of the Difficulty and Obscurity of Scripture, to leave every Man to his own Liberty, and study to preserve our Charity towards those who differ from us, and treat even such as we are sure are in Error with Candor and Meekness; since this is what may be the Case of any one of us some time or other, and is perhaps the Case of those who are most forward and hasty in condemning others.

WHERE the Scripture itself is obscure, and capable of different Senses, it can hardly be but that one Man will prefer one Sense before another, and another prefer that which he rejects; and there is no Reason why Mens Fancies (which Men are to follow when Reason is at a stop) should be bound to be like one another, any more than their Faces. If the Place will admit of various Interpretations, 'tis reasonable that every one should be indulg'd the Liberty of interpreting and choosing for himself; and 'tis very imperious to impose upon others any one particular Interpretation in opposition to those many others which the Place will equally admit.

H

W E



S E R M.

III.

WE are apt indeed to think that the Scriptures are clear on our Side, and speak so plainly our own Opinions, that we cannot help wondering that others, who read the Scriptures, do not understand them as we do; and we fancy that the only Reason why they do not, is because they come with Prejudices and have not the true Belief; *i. e.* in other words, they have not the same Notions as we have, and do not believe as we do: If they did, they would certainly interpret Scripture as we do; *i. e.* if they were of our Mind, they would agree with us. And this is no more than what they may justly return upon us. It will equally serve all Sides, and is therefore of no service at all but to shew the Necessity of our bearing with one another in our different Opinions and Persuasions.

FOR since different Opinions are unavoidable, and Men will, especially in Matters of a doubtful and difficult Nature, vary in their Judgments; this affords an excellent Argument for their bearing with one another in these Matters, and joining heartily in the Practice and Defence of all the great and necessary Points of Christianity. The

is the proper Use to be made of this Variety S E R M.  
of Opinions: Not to throw up all Religion III.  
as uncertain, because many things under the  
Name of Religion have been disputed and  
differently decided by different Persons; but  
to keep close to those things about which  
we find a general Agreement amongst good  
Men; and instead of labouring to defend  
and reconcile all the Notions and Opinions  
of Men, to contend earnestly for the plain  
Truths of the Gospel, and *that Faith which*  
*was once deliver'd to the Saints.*

It does not follow, that because we are  
fallible we can be certain of nothing; or be-  
cause we are liable to Error, that we can  
never be sure that we are in the right; or  
because we are ignorant of some things, that  
we know nothing at all. But because there  
are some Things which none of us know;  
because in many things we are all of us  
mistaken; and because none of us are infal-  
lible, it does follow that we should bear  
with one another's Weakness and Infirmi-  
ties, and treat those kindly who happen to  
be of another Opinion, and not suffer our  
Differences in smaller Matters, to hinder  
the good Effects of our Agreement in those

S E R M. that are of the greatest Importance.  
 III. 'TIS true indeed, that Christianity enjoins that we *all speak the same thing, that there be no Divisions among us, but that we be perfectly join'd together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment,* 1 Cor. i. 10. But this Unity and Agreement must be understood of things necessary, of fundamental Articles of Faith: For as to other Matters, which are in themselves doubtful and unnecessary, there will be Diversity of Persuasions; and a perfect Unity and Agreement is indeed to be wish'd, but cannot be hop'd for: The most that can be done, and that is reasonable in itself, as well as an express Duty, is to preserve and maintain mutual Peace and Charity amidst these doubtful Disputations.

AND this is the more necessary because the Enemies of Religion never fail to make their Advantage of the Differences there are among the true Believers; and while they observe each Side so warm and earnest in the Defence of their several Tenets and Opinions, and uncharitably condemning all who differ from them. They would insinuate that there is no Certainty at all in

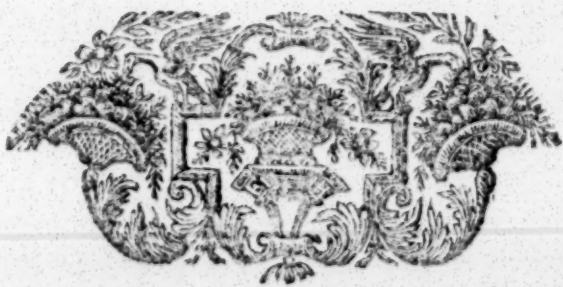


any of the Principles of Religion, that all the contending Parties may be in the wrong in every thing which they hold, and that the safest way is to stand neuter, and not to concern themselves with Religion at all. But if Men, instead of spending their Zeal in doubtful *Disputations*, would unite in the Defence of the weightier Matters of the Law, in the plain and uncontested Truths of Religion, and leave every one to their Liberty in lesser things: This would make very much for the Interest of true Religion, and disarm its Enemies of the most formidable Weapons with which they fight against it.

THE Kingdom of Christ does thus far partake of the Nature of the Kingdoms of this World, that Union and good Agreement amongst the Subjects is the best Defence and Preservative of both. As it is the greatest Security to any civil Society, for the Members of that Society to keep close to the fundamental Laws of the Constitution, and to maintain them against all Opposers, and not to suffer their Differences in lesser Matters to alienate their Affections from each other, and hinder them from

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III.

uniting to secure the main Chance: So it is the greatest Security to Christianity, for Christians to agree in the Belief and Practice of the Fundamentals of their Religion, and not let their Disputes in other Matters take them off from the Defence of the common Cause of Christianity against those who watch all Opportunities of undermining it, and desire no better than such as the Heats and Divisions which are amongst Christians give them. For our Saviour's Maxim is universally true, *Mat. xii. 25. Every Kingdom divided against itself, is brought to Desolation: And every City or House divided against itself shall not stand.* And if Christians, who agree in the Essentials of their Religion, be divided, and become Enemies to one another for lesser Matters; this must necessarily turn to the Detriment of the State of Christianity.



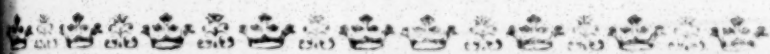
S E R M.

capab  
Adva  
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## SERMON IV.

Concerning the Authority of  
the *Antients*.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which  
is good.*



H A T Right and Liberty of S E R M.  
private Judgment, which I IV.  
have taken occasion to treat  
of from these Words, being  
liable to many Abuses and  
Inconveniences, as well as  
capable of being turn'd to our Benefit and  
Advantage ; I have in some of my last Dis-  
courses, been considering both the one and



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the other. Not that I think the Merits of the Cause to turn upon this, since our Right to this Liberty of private Judgment depends upon other Considerations wholly different, and distinct from the Conveniences or Inconveniences which attend it.

HOWEVER, it may be of use, upon other accounts, to consider and compare these with one another. This may serve to clear up some Difficulties, and to confirm and strengthen that which I conceive to be the right side of the present Question. Besides which, I think, when we are endeavouring to establish any Point, and do this out of a right Principle; when we are contending for Truth and not for Victory, 'tis not fair to conceal any thing which can be urg'd against the Cause we have undertaken. For which Reasons I have already consider'd some of the chief Objections which are usually rais'd against Mens using their own private Reason and Judgment in religious Matters.

BUT it may be farther objected, that if every Man is to judge for himself in religious Matters, and believe only as he sees Reason to believe; this seems to destroy the Credit and Authority

Authority of the first and earliest Writers of S E R M.  
Christianity, who as they liv'd nearest the IV.  
Times of our Saviour and his Apostles, so  
they may justly be presum'd to know the  
true Faith better than we can pretend to do  
at this Distance, and therefore their Credit  
ought to be rely'd upon, and prefer'd before  
our own Reason and judgment.

THIS naturally leads me to treat of a  
Question of great Importance, *viz.* How far  
we ought to be determin'd in our Belief  
merely by human Authority.

FOR the clearer Solution of this Point,  
I observe in general, that whatever real  
Help and Assistance the Writings of the  
Antients can afford us, we are oblig'd to  
make use of for the Improvement of our  
Reason, and the Information of our Judg-  
ment. This is very consistent with judging  
for ourselves, which, as has been frequently  
observ'd already, implies the Use of every  
thing which will enable us to form a true  
Judgment. And therefore, if there be any  
thing in Religion which we cannot judge of  
ourselves, upon account of the Distance we  
are from the Fountain, and which they  
only are Judges of who liv'd at or near  
those

S E R M. those Times, in such things we must rely  
IV. upon their Testimony.

OF this Nature are all Facts, whatever strictly and properly so call'd, whether they be those upon which the Truth of the Christian Revelation depends, as the Life and Actions of our Saviour and his Apostles; or whether they be such as relate to the external Government and Discipline of the Church, or the publick Forms of divine Worship, or the like. But the present Question is not about such things as these; but about Articles of Faith, and Rules of Life; about the true Doctrine of Christianity as contain'd in the New Testament, and the true Sense and Meaning of any controverted Places in that Book. Now these are Questions of Reason and Judgment, and not only of Fact. It may indeed be call'd a matter of Fact, that such a Doctrine was, in the earliest Times, receiv'd for the Doctrine of Christianity. That such a Place of Scripture was then understood in such a Sense, and made use of to prove and establish such a Doctrine. But then these are such Facts as do not determine the Question now before us, which is, whether

such



such Doctrines were *rightly* receiv'd as the true Doctrines of Christianity, and were really such; and whether such Scriptures were *rightly* so interpreted, and truly understood, when taken in that Sense. Whereas Facts of an historical Nature are to be receiv'd upon the Credit and Testimony of those who deliver them; of which when we are once satisfy'd, this is all the Evidence we can have of their Truth at this Distance: But the Facts I am now speaking of, are not to be so admitted, because they leave room for the Exercise of our own Reason and Judgment, which will afford us other, and many times better Evidence of their Truth, than the bare Testimony and Authority of others.

THOUGH I am to receive Historical Facts chiefly upon the Credit of the Relator; yet I am not oblig'd, nor indeed ought I to receive any Doctrine for the true Doctrine of Christianity barely upon any human Authority whatever. Here I must examine Matters my self, and not only enquire whether the Doctrine was receiv'd by the Primitive Church as the true Doctrine of Christianity, but whether it be grounded on, and may be prov'd by the holy Scriptures

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tures. And if I cannot perceive it to have a sufficient Foundation in Scripture, I am not under any Obligation to believe it to be the true Doctrine of Christianity merely because it was antiently receiv'd as such.

AND the Case is the same with regard to the Sense and Meaning of any particular Passage of Scripture. I am not oblig'd to take any Interpretation to be the true one merely because it is antient, unless it be agreeable to the Phraseology of the Scriptures, the Scope of the Place, and other such rational Methods of interpreting Authors.

BUT here it will be said, that they who liv'd in or near the Apostles Times, who convers'd with them, who were their Scholars and Disciples, or convers'd with those who were so; may be presum'd to understand what was true Christianity and what the Sense and Meaning of the New Testament, better than we; and therefore whatever they have deliver'd for the Doctrine of Christianity, or the true Sense of any particular Passages of Scripture, ought to be receiv'd as such, and

prefer

prefer'd before our own Reason and Judg. SERM.  
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IN answer to this, there are several things to be consider'd.

I. THAT these were Men, and, as such, liable to Errors and Mistakes as well as we. And if the Apostles themselves, before they were inspir'd, mistook our Saviour's Meaning in very plain Matters, whatever was the Occasion, why might not these as well mistake the Apostles themselves? And what Assurance or Security have we that they did not? And why then should we receive their Opinions, or rely upon them, any farther than they are agreeable to Reason, or actually supported by it? If the Apostles, who convers'd so much and so familiarly with our Saviour, did not understand what he so often and so plainly told them concerning the Design of his coming into the World, and the Nature of his Kingdom, his Death and Resurrection, and the like: I say if in these and other Cases they evidently mistook our Saviour, and continu'd long in their Error: Whatever was the Cause of this, the same or the like Causes might hinder those



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those who convers'd with the Apostles from understanding their Meaning in several things which they spake of; so that they may have deliver'd that to us for the Doctrine of the Apostles which was nothing but their own mistaken Opinion. If they labour'd under any such Prejudices and Prepossessions as the Apostles manifestly did, they might mistake them, as well as they did our Saviour; and if it be pretended that all that they have wrote was either what they receiv'd from the Apostles, or agreeable and consonant to what they receiv'd, 'tis more than probable that they did.

2. IF we had a competent Number of Writers immediately after the Apostles and a competent Number of their undoubted Writings; they might be of great use to us (tho' not strictly speaking of an Authority) in determining the true Doctrines of Christianity, and the true Sense of Scripture. But since we have the Writings but of a few, in comparison, of the first and earliest Writers, and but a small Part remaining of what they may be suppos'd to have written. So that there are

but few, in comparison, that can claim SERM.  
our Belief upon account of the Privilege IV.  
they enjoy'd of conversing with the Apostles or their immediate Successors and Scholars. And therefore tho' we should suppose this Privilege to be never so great and valuable in itself, and that they made the best use of it that was possible; yet this is not of such Advantage to us as to free us from the Trouble of examining things ourselves, supposing that upon other accounts that was not our Duty, because there are but a few Points which they have fully handled and determin'd for us. To which Purpose I observe,

3. THAT those Writings which we have remaining of those Times do not treat of many of the Subjects which are now debated. Several Disputes and Controversies have been rais'd which they never thought of, and which, without the Spirit of Prophecy, it was impossible that they should ever foresee or provide against. So that in most Cases we cannot appeal to them as Judges, because they are silent in the Point. And whenever they mention any thing, as they sometimes do, relating to

S E R M. to our present Disputes, 'tis only incidentally, and in such a Manner as that we cannot determine what was their Opinion in the Case, unless they had treated more largely and professedly of it.

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4. M A N Y of the first and earliest Writers were Converts from Heathenism to Christianity, and were not so well acquainted with Jewish Learning as many others which came after them: And yet this was very necessary towards forming a right Judgment of several Doctrines of Christianity, and understanding several Passages of the New Testament, which have a manifest Reference to the Mosaic Dispensation, and allude to the legal Rights and Ceremonies of Divine Worship, and require a competent Knowledge and Skill in Jewish Antiquities.

5. 'Tis to the full as difficult to understand the Writings of the Antients, as the Scriptures themselves: The Language in which their Books are wrote, the peculiar Idioms and Phrases which they use, the various Figures and Rhetorical Flourishes, the Terms of Art and Logic, Subtilities and Distinctions, with which



their Writings abound, make it very hard SERM.  
to understand their true Meaning: And IV.  
no Man can pretend to this, without a  
great deal of previous Knowledge, and  
much Diligence and Application; without  
being well vers'd in these Writings, and  
having often read them. So that upon the  
whole, I believe the Scriptures themselves,  
generally speaking, are as easy, if not ea-  
sier to be understood than these primitive  
Writers; which further appears from  
hence, that there has always been as much  
Dispute about the Meaning of these Writ-  
ers, as about the Sense of Scripture. We  
often find not only the same Authors, but  
even the same Passages of those Authors,  
quoted by different Parties to serve differ-  
ent, and even contrary Purposes; which  
shews that they are as hard to be inter-  
preted as the Scriptures themselves, and  
therefore that we may as safely trust to our  
own Reason and Understanding assisted  
with proper Accomplishments in interpret-  
ing Scripture for ourselves, as take up with  
that Sense and Meaning which they have  
put upon it, and which, in many Cases, is

SERM. as difficult to find out, as the Sense of the  
 IV. Scripture itself.

THAT this is often the Case of these Writers appears from many undeniable Proofs; and if we had not these Proofs, we might reasonably argue from the Wisdom and Goodness of God, that the Scriptures, which were wrote for the general Use of Mankind, are, in all necessary Points at least, much plainer and easier to be understood than any human Compositions; and that the difficult and unnecessary Points are there as clearly express'd as the Wisdom of God thought fit to express them, and that the Wisdom of Man cannot invent any more plain or proper Ways of expressing them.

6. THESE Writers, as they were fallible Men, so they have actually err'd in several material Points, as will evidently appear to any one who will peruse the Writings of those who have treated at large upon this Subject. There is scarce any one of these Authors who has not contradicted another, and very few who have not contradicted themselves: So that we shall find it very difficult to determine any

Point

Point with certainty by their Authority, S E R M.  
IV.  
if their Authority was sufficient to do it.

'Tis not easy to gather from them what was the general Belief of the Church in those Ages, or what was their own private and settled Opinion. And yet if this could be never so clearly collected; I observe,

7. THAT in difficult Points (for in plain Cases there is no question but Men may judge for themselves, I say in difficult Points) the Number of Authorities ought not to determine us to follow that Opinion which has most Patrons: Because in Matters of real Difficulty and Obscurity, 'tis more probable that but a few have found out the Truth, and determin'd the Point right, than that a great many have done so. For if we take the whole Bulk of Mankind, 'tis certain that the thinking and inquisitive Part are by far the least: And if again we take these and divide them, tis equally certain that they who have thought justly, and examin'd things thoroughly, are by far the smallest Number; so that in all intricate and difficult Questions, the Determination of which



SER. M. requires great Industry and Sagacity, 'tis  
 IV. most likely that that wherein but a few  
 agree should be the true Opinion. Hence  
 it appears,

8. THAT the Opinions of others ought to be of no weight with us any farther than they are supported by sufficient Reasons. For tho' they may be right in their Opinions, 'tis not right in us to be of those Opinions purely because they were so. This is what we cannot justify, since we are reasonable Creatures, and capable, in proportion to the Helps we enjoy, of judging between Truth and Falshood as well as they; and ought therefore to examine things as far as we are able before we receive them for true. To encourage us to this, I observe,

9. THAT tho' we had never so many of the Writings of the Antients, and these Writings had determin'd never so many Points now in Controversy amongst us; yet there would be still room left for the Exercise of our own Reason and Judgment. We are not to receive their Opinions with an implicit Belief, or to stop where they have done, or imagine that they

they have perfectly exhausted every Subject, and that there is no room for any farther or future Discoveries of Truth. On the contrary, we have the Advantage of coming after them, and stand as it were upon their Shoulders; and may therefore see farther than they, and discover those things which they were unacquainted with. We enjoy their Labours, which may be of great Benefit and Advantage to us, and ought to be us'd as such; by improving them, and carrying them farther on, and not resting finally satisfy'd and contented with them.

'Tis true indeed that Christianity differs in this respect from human Arts and Sciences; that they are most imperfect at first, and take their Rise from small beginnings; that they are improv'd by degrees, and in long Tract of Time are brought to perfection: Whereas Christianity was most perfect at the Beginning when it was first preach'd by our Saviour and his Apostles; and in every succeeding Age lost more or less of its primitive Purity and Simplicity; till at length it became so degenerated and corrupted, so mix'd and blended with human

S E R M. Doctrines and Inventions, that it was difficult to discern it, and reform it in any tolerable measure according to the primitive Pattern and Standard.

IV.

So that tho' Christianity, if it had never suffer'd any of these Changes and Corruptions, could not be better known and understood now than it was in any of the preceding Ages, yet since this has been the Case; since Christianity has actually suffer'd such Changes and Corruptions, and those human Writings, which are suppos'd to contain the best Accounts of the Doctrines of Christianity, have had their Share in the common Calamity; there is room for daily Study and Enquiry to find out the true Doctrines of Christianity, to separate the genuine Monuments of Antiquity from those that are spurious, and to settle every thing upon its true Bottom.

EVEN the Scriptures themselves which are the Standard of the true Christian Doctrine tho' they have suffer'd less from the Injuries of Time than any other Books whatever, will, however, be better understood the more they are search'd into and study'd. Tho' they that have gone before us have



done much in this kind, yet they have left S E R M.  
enough to do for those that come after; IV.  
and it cannot be deny'd that in these latter  
Ages, several Parts of Learning, which contribute very much to a right Understanding of the Scriptures, have been more study'd and carry'd to a greater Height of Perfection than they were in the earliest Times of Christianity; and that the Bible is now become a more intelligible Book, and generally speaking is better understood than it was then. This will fully appear to any one who will but compare together the several Comments and Interpretations of the Antients and the Moderns, where, notwithstanding the Respect which upon other accounts is justly due to Antiquity, the Advantage is too great and visible not to be seen and acknowledg'd: And there still is, and always will be room for farther Improvements of this kind. As several Passages of Scripture which but few then understood, and many mistook, are now set in a clear Light; so those which are now obscure, may, in Time, be clear'd up, if we take the same Liberty of exercising our own Reason and Judgment, and

SERM. use the same Diligence and Application as  
IV. those that went before us.

BUT if we are to embrace any Opinions purely because they were the Opinions of those who liv'd so many ages before us; we shall not only embrace many Errors for Truths, but shall deprive both ourselves and others of the Knowledge of those Truths, which by a due Use and Improvement of our Faculties we might have attain'd to.

TO which purpose *Lactantius* thus argues \*, ' Every one (says he) ought in  
' those

\* Quare oportet, in eâ re maxime, in quâ vitæ ratio versatur, sibi quemque confidere, suoque judicio, ac propriis sensibus nisi ad investigandam, & perpendendam veritatem, quam credentem alienis erroribus, decipi, tanquam ipsum rationis expertem. De dicit omnibus Deus pro virili portione sapientiam; ut & inaudita investigare possent, & audita perpendere. Nec quia nos illi temporibus antecesserunt, sapientiâ igitur antecesserunt: quæ si omnibus æqualiter datur, occupari ab antecedentibus non potest. Illobabilis est tanquam lux, & claritas solis; quia ut sol occulorum, sic sapientia lumen est cordis humani. Quare cum sapiens id est, veritatem quærere, omnibus sit innatum: sapientiam sibi adimunt, qui sine ullo judicio inventa majorum probant, & ab aliis pecudum more ducuntur. Sed hoc eos fallit, quod majorum nomine posito, non putant fieri posse, ut aut ipsi plus sapiant quia minores vocantur; aut illi desipuerint, quia majores nominantur. Quid ergo impedit, quin ab ipsis sumamus exemplum, ut quomodo illi, qui falsa invenerant, posteris tradiderunt: sic

those things which concern the Conduct  
 of his Life and Actions to trust himself  
 and his own Judgment, and to rely upon  
 his own Senses in searching after Truth,  
 rather than to believe the Errors of o-  
 thers, and thereby be deceiv'd, as if he  
 himself was void of Reason. God has  
 given to every Man a sufficient Share of  
 Wisdom, both to discover things which  
 he never heard of before, and to examine  
 those which others tell him. It does not  
 follow that they who liv'd before us must  
 therefore surpass us in Wisdom, which,  
 if it be imparted equally to all Men, can-  
 not be engross'd by those that went be-  
 fore us. It resembles the Light and  
 Brightness of the Sun, in that it is pure  
 and free, and not to be seiz'd on or oc-  
 cupied by any; and as the Sun is the  
 Light of the Eye, so is Wisdom the Light  
 of the human Soul. And therefore since  
 'tis natural to all Men to be wise, *i. e.*  
 to search after Truth, they debar them-  
 selves from Wisdom, who, without any  
 Judgment, receive the Opinions of the

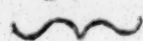
S E R M,  
 IV.

nos, qui verum invenimus, posteris meliora tradamus? *Lactant.*  
*de Origine Erroris, Lib. II. Sect. vii. p. 104. Edit. Thysii, Lugd.*  
*Batav. 1652. 8°.*

Antients,



S E R M.  
IV.



Antients, and follow like Sheep where-  
 ever they see the Footsteps of others-  
 But their Mistake lies in this, that where-  
 ever the venerable Stamp of Antiquity is  
 set, they think it impossible for them-  
 selves, who are so much younger, to  
 know more; or for those who are so  
 much elder to be less wise than them-  
 selves, because they are so much elder.  
 Why then should we not imitate the  
 Antients, and deal with others as they  
 have dealt with us; and since they have  
 deliver'd to Posterity their erroneous  
 Discoveries, why should not we, who  
 discover any Truth, hand it down to  
 those who shall succeed us?"

To this Passage of *Lactantius*, I shall  
 subjoin another to the same Purpose out of  
 a modern Writer, whom I have often cit-  
 ed in these Discourses. 'The last wrong  
 Measure (says he) of Probability I shall  
 take notice of, and which keeps in Ignor-  
 ance, or Error, more People than all  
 the other together, is the giving up our  
 Assent to the common receiv'd Opinions  
 either of our Friends, or Party; Neigh-  
 bourhood or Country. How many Mea-

have

‘ have no other Ground for their Tenets, S E R M.  
‘ than the suppos’d Honesty, or Learning, IV.  
‘ or Number of those of the same Profes-  
‘ sion? as if honest or bookish Men could  
‘ not err; or Truth were to be establish’d  
‘ by the Vote of the Multitude: Yet this  
‘ with most Men serves the turn. The  
‘ Tenet has had the Attestation of Reve-  
‘ rend Antiquity, it comes to me with  
‘ the Passport of former Ages, and there-  
‘ fore I am secure in the Reception I give  
‘ it: Other Men have been, and are of the  
‘ same Opinion (for that is all is said) and  
‘ therefore it is reasonable for me to em-  
‘ brace it. A Man may more justifiably  
‘ throw up Cross and Pile for his Opinions  
‘ than take them up by such Measures.  
‘ All Men are liable to Error, and most  
‘ Men are in many Points, by Passion or  
‘ Interest, under Temptation to it. If we  
‘ could but see the secret Motives, that in-  
‘ fluenc’d the Men of Name and Learning  
‘ in the World, and the Leaders of Parties,  
‘ we should not always find, that it was  
‘ the embracing of Truth for its own sake,  
‘ that made ’em espouse the Doctrines they  
‘ own’d and maintain’d. This at least is  
‘ certain,

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‘ certain, there is not an Opinion so absurd,  
‘ which a Man may not receive upon this  
‘ Ground. There is no Error to be named  
‘ which has not had its Professors: And a  
‘ Man shall never want crooked Paths to  
‘ walk in, if he thinks that he is in the  
‘ right Way, wherever he has the Foot-  
‘ steps of others to follow.’

FROM what has been said upon this Argument, it fully appears that we ought to keep our Liberty of private Judgment entire, and to exercise it in religious Matters, notwithstanding the Opinions and Determinations of those who have gone before us; that in Questions of Right and Judgment our Understandings ought not to be over-ruled by the great Name and Reputation of others; or blindly and servilely submit to any human Authority whatever. Where any Man of great Reputation for Wisdom and Learning, affirms any thing; there I should give such a Degree of Assent to it as such an Authority can produce: But this will not amount to a firm Belief of it, unless there be no greater Authority against it; and farther, unless there be sufficient Arguments to prove the Truth of his Affirmation. If ma-



ny wise and learned Men agree in their  
Opinions about any particular Point, I should  
give them such farther Degrees of Assent as  
so many Authorities together can produce;  
but neither would this amount to a full per-  
suasion of the Truth of what they affirm,  
unless there were no higher Authorities a-  
gainst it; and besides this, I could discern  
sufficient Reasons to believe it. For bare  
Authorities, how many and great soever they  
be, if not supported by Reason and Argu-  
ment, cannot, for the Reasons already al-  
ledg'd, amount to an absolute Certainty, but  
to a Probability only of Truth: And Points  
of Faith ought to be grounded not upon  
Probabilities but upon necessary Truths. So  
that the naked and bare Assertions of any  
Man or Number of Men whatever, and  
whenever they liv'd, excepting only those  
who receiv'd what they deliver'd from the  
Apostles themselves (which Case has been  
consider'd already) are no sufficient Ground  
for us to build our Opinions upon, nor  
ought to incline our Assent but in Propor-  
tion to the Evidence there is for the Truth  
of these Assertions.

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WE are apt I know, to have a great regard for those who liv'd long ago, and who were then in great Esteem in the World, and to conclude in their Favour that they could never have embrac'd such an Opinion except it had been true; and therefore whatever Reasons they had to believe it, we may depend upon it for a Truth. But this is a very weak Way of concluding. Their living so long ago, and the Esteem they had in the World are different and distinct Considerations. If they had justly a great Esteem and Reputation in the World, their being of any particular Opinions would have thus much weight with me, that it would incline me to examine those Opinions which I find they maintain'd, and see what Ground there was for them: Because I should think such Men would not take up their Opinions lightly, nor affirm any thing confidently, but what they had Reason to believe was true. Where they have given us their Reasons why they held such Opinions, and believ'd them to be true, I should examine those Reasons, and see whether they were sufficient to produce such a Belief; because I should think that what was a Reason to them,

them, was so in itself, or at least had some weight in it, and deserv'd to be consider'd by others. All this I should think worth while to do upon account of the great Name and Reputation they had in the World. And tho' I should not think myself oblig'd to pay this Respect to every private obscure Writer, yet I should think myself oblig'd to pay it to Authors of great Note and Reputation: But this I should do upon account of the Reputation they had, and not *propter mille annos*, because they liv'd many Ages ago. For that, as I said, is a distinct Consideration, and of no weight, in itself, to determine our Belief in any Case.

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THAT this may appear the more plainly, let us put the Case as it is stated by an excellent Writer, who has handled this very Question. If we, says he, had liv'd in their Times (for so we must look upon them now, as they did who without Prejudice beheld them) I suppose we should then have beheld them, as we in *England* look on those Prelates, who are of great Reputation for Learning and Sanctity; here only is the Difference; when Persons are living their Authority is depress'd by personal Defailures, and



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and the contrary Interests of their Contemporaries, which disband when they are dead, and leave their Credit entire upon the Reputation of those excellent Books, and Monuments of Learning and Piety which are left behind: But beyond this, why the Bishop of *Hippo* shall have greater Authority than the Bishop of the *Canaries*, *ceteris paribus*, I understand not. For did they that liv'd (to instance) in St. *Austin's* Time believe all that he wrote? If they did, they were much to blame, or else himself was to blame for retracting much of it a little before his Death: And if while he liv'd, his Affirmative was no more Authority than derives from the Credit of one very wise Man, against whom also very wise Men were oppos'd; I know not why his Authority should prevail farther now: For there is nothing added to the Strength of his Reason, since that Time, but only that he hath been in great esteem with Posterity: And that be all, why the Opinion of the following Ages shall be of more force than the Opinion of the first Ages, against whom St. *Austin* in many things clearly did oppose himself, I see no Reason; or whether the

first Ages were against him or no, yet that he is approv'd by the following Ages is no better Argument; for it makes his Authority not to be innate, but deriv'd from the Opinion of others, and so to be *precaria*, and to depend upon others, who if they should change their Opinions (and such Examples there have been many) then there were nothing left to urge our Consent to him; which, when it was at the best, was only this, because he had the good Fortune to be believ'd by them that came after, he must be so still; and because it was no Argument for the old Doctors before him, this will not be very good in his Behalf: The same I say of any Company of them, I say not so of all of them, it is to no purpose to say it, for there is no Question this Day in Contestation, in the Explication of which all the old Writers did consent: In the Assignment of the Canon of Scripture, they never did consent for six Hundred Years together, and then by that Time the Bishops had agreed indifferently well, and but indifferently, upon that they fell out in twenty more; and except it be in the Apostles Creed, and Articles of such Nature, there is nothing which

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may

S E R M.  
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S E R M. may with any Colour be call'd a Consent,  
 IV. much less Tradition universal.

WE see then that the Opinions of other Men ought not to over-rule our own private Judgment, nor to be of any greater Weight than the Arguments have which may be urg'd to support them. Just so much Evidence as there is of the Truth of their Tenets, just so much Assent we should yield them. This is what their Authority must at last be resolv'd into, and not into the Antiquity or great Names of the Authors. These things indeed may incline us to examine their Opinions, but not to swallow them whole without any Examination. This would be to pay them such a Deference as is not due to any finite and fallible Understanding, but only to the infinite and infallible Wisdom of God. This is such an high Degree of Respect as they themselves never thought of or desir'd. They frequently remark upon one another's Failings, and are not backward in acknowledging their own. And certainly we cannot think that they ever design'd we should have a greater Opinion of them than they had of themselves.

THEY often advise those who liv'd in  
 their



their own Times, to examine what they deliver'd, and to receive or reject it, according as they found it consentant or repugnant to Truth. Thus *Origen* entreats his Hearers that they would prove whatsoever he had taught them, and that they would be attentive and receive the Grace of the Spirit, from whom proceedeth the Discerning of the Spirits; that so, as good Bankers, they might diligently observe when their Pastor deceiveth them, and when he preacheth unto them that which is pious and true.

ST. CYRIL also thus addresseth himself to his Hearers, Believe me not, says he, upon my bare Word in any thing which I shall deliver, unless you find the things which I preach demonstrated out of the holy Scriptures: For the Preservation and Establishment of our Faith is not grounded upon human Eloquence, but upon the Proofs which are brought out of the inspir'd Writings.

ANOTHER in his Comments upon one of the Prophets has these Words. And thus have I deliver'd unto you my Sense in a few Words, but if any one produce that which is more exact and true, take his Exposition rather than mine. And in another Place,

SER M. We have now done our utmost Endeavour;  
 IV. in giving an allegorical Exposition of the  
 Text; but if any other Person can bring  
 that which is more probable, and agreeable  
 to Reason, than that which we have deliver'd;  
 let the Reader be sway'd by his Authority rather than ours. And to name no  
 more, in another Place he speaks to the same  
 Purpose, This we have deliver'd according  
 to the utmost of our poor Ability, and have  
 briefly touch'd the different Opinions both of  
 our own Men, and of the *Jews*; yet if any  
 Man can give me a better and truer Account  
 of these things, I shall be very ready to embrace it.

Now if these Authors had not been  
 thus open and ingenuous in acknowledging  
 their own Failings, and advising their Hear-  
 ers and Readers to make use of their own  
 Reason and Judgment, and not believe them  
 any farther than they appear'd to have  
 Truth on their Side; yet the Reasons which  
 I have already urg'd are sufficient to justify  
 this, and to make us examine their Writ-  
 ings with the same Freedom that we do  
 those of other Men: But since they them-  
 selves have freely made this Confession, and

give

given us this charitable Admonition, we S E R M.  
cannot think ourselves so ty'd up that we IV.  
have no Liberty of receding from any thing  
which they have laid down, but must adhere  
and assent to whatever they have deliver'd,  
without searching into the Reasons and  
Grounds of their Opinions.

THEY confess themselves liable to Errors  
and Mistakes, and have left behind them  
many undeniable Proofs of the Truth of what  
they confess; and therefore we are utterly  
inexcusable, if, after this, we think ourselves  
oblig'd to believe all they say, without any  
farther Trial or Examination. If they had  
any Advantage over us by living so many  
Ages before us, we enjoy this Advantage in  
their Writings, which we ought to study  
and attend to, but not rely upon any farther  
than what they deliver is grounded upon  
Reason and Scripture. And if we have any  
Advantage over them by coming so long af-  
ter them, as we certainly have, since many  
Points have been more narrowly search'd  
into, and more thoroughly study'd and ex-  
amin'd than ever they were in their Times;  
we ought to make use of this Advantage in



SER. M. correcting those Errors and Mistakes which  
 IV. they have been guilty of, and discovering  
 and establishing those Truths which they  
 either knew not at all, or knew but imperfectly.

THIS is that Liberty which they themselves allow, and which every Man ought to take whether they allow it or no; since, in a Matter of such Importance as Religion is, no Man can justify his Receiving any thing for Truth without sufficient Evidence; and where Men affirm any Thing without either Scripture or Reason on their Side, their bare Authority is by no means sufficient to oblige us to believe as they believ'd, and to admit as a clear and unquestionable Point whatever they shall propose to us for such. In Cases of this Nature, the first Question ought always to be whether the thing be true or false, and not whether it has been believ'd or no. For, as on the one hand, it is no sufficient Argument to us of the Truth of any Doctrine that the Antients believ'd it, unless we find also some Reason of their Belief: So on the other hand it is no Argument to dissuade us from believing any thing, because

because we are ignorant whether Antiquity S E R M.  
 believ'd it or no, if we be beforehand assur'd IV.  
 of the Truth of it, and that the thing actual-  
 ly is so. Now the Truth of Things depends  
 not upon the Opinions of Men, nor is to be  
 voted and carried by Numbers, but must be  
 prov'd by Arguments drawn from the Na-  
 ture and Reason of things, or from the plain  
 Declarations of holy Scripture; both which  
 are before and above all human Testimony.  
 So that when human Testimonies are alledg'd,  
 they do not prove the Truth of those Ar-  
 ticles of Faith in Favour of which they are  
 alledg'd; but only shew the Clearness of  
 them, and that they are so plainly contain'd  
 in Scripture, that different Men, at very  
 different and distant Times, have extracted  
 the same Propositions out of this Book, and  
 agreed in giving us the same Interpretation  
 of several Passages in it.

I say this concurrent Testimony of antient  
 Writers shews the Clearness of those Points  
 which they thus unanimously deliver, but it  
 is not in itself any Proof of their Truth. It  
 is a strong Presumption, indeed, that there  
 are good Proofs of the Truth of what they

SERM.

IV.

thus universally maintain, and that the Strength and Clearness of these Proofs was the Occasion of this Agreement. But then it is our Duty to search out and examine these Proofs, and not to ground our Belief upon their naked Testimony. And when we further consider, what has been already hinted, how few Points there are for which the universal Consent of Antiquity can be pleaded; how much the antient Writers contradict one another and themselves; how hard they are to be understood, and how difficult it is many Times to collect their Sense and Meaning, and to make them speak consistently; and how often they have actually err'd, and been guilty of great Mistakes; and how they themselves caution us against a blind and implicit Belief of what they have deliver'd: I say, whoever considers these and such like Particulars, which the foregoing Discourse will naturally suggest, can never think himself oblig'd to pay an absolute and unlimited Deference to Antiquity, and to take all for Oracle which the Antients have taught; but will find it necessary to preserve entire his Liberty of private



private Judgment, and instead of consulting  
 their Credit and Authority, to provide for  
 his own Safety and Happiness, by practis-  
 ing the Precept in the Text, of *proving all*  
*things, and holding fast that which is*  
*good.*

SERM.  
 IV.

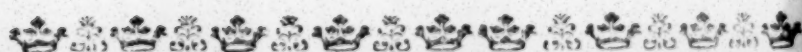


SER-



## SERMON V.

Objections out of Scripture,  
against *Free-thinking*, an-  
swer'd.



1 THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which  
is good.*

S E R M.  
V.



FROM these Words I have ta-  
ken occasion to discourse at  
large concerning the Use and  
Exercise of our own private  
Reason and Judgment in religious Matters;  
and in order to set this Argument in as clear

a light as I could, I have consider'd and en-S E R M.  
deavour'd to answer some of the chief Ob-V.  
jections to which this Doctrine is liable.

BESIDES those Difficulties which I have already examin'd, it may be farther object-  
ed, that tho' Reason was, in its original and  
primitive State, a proper Judge in religious  
Matters, it cannot be admitted for such in  
its present Degeneracy and Corruption.

IF by this Degeneracy and Corruption  
be meant any Defect or Weakness in Reason,  
arising from Mens Lusts and Vices, from  
Partiality, Prejudice, or any such Cause as  
Men voluntary bring upon themselves, 'tis  
nothing to the present Purpose: Because I  
have already laid it down as a necessary  
Qualification to enable Men to form a right  
Judgment, that they should divest them-  
selves of all such Impediments and Hindrances  
as these. And therefore, tho' they whose  
Reason is thus corrupted, are incompetent  
Judges of religious Matters, or indeed of any  
Matter whatever; yet they, who have kept  
their Reason clear from all such Corruption,  
may be allow'd to judge for themselves.

BUT if by this Corruption of our Reason,  
be meant something which is general and  
even



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V.

even universal, and which all Men are unavoidably involv'd in, and which is usually ascrib'd to *Adam's* Fall: It remains to be well prov'd that human Reason has thus suffer'd, before it ought to be displac'd from what was at first design'd for its proper Province and Employment, *to judge of religious Matters.*

THO' it should be granted, that Man is not now that perfect Creature which he was, when he came at first out of the Hands of his Maker: Yet 'tis hardly to be suppos'd, and impossible to be prov'd, that his Faculties, either of Soul or Body, were so impair'd by the Fall, that they are now unable to perform their several Offices, and answer the Ends for which they were at first design'd. The Feet can still walk, and the Hands handle; and all the Organs of the Body can still perform their several Functions. And so it is with the Faculties of the Soul. The Memory is still able to retain what is committed to it; the Understanding to discern and judge between Truth and Falshood, Good and Evil; and the Will to chuse the one, and refuse the other. And that Men take themselves to be thus capable

ble of these several Employments, appears from their using these Faculties to these Purposes, which would be vain and insignificant if they were incapable of answering these Ends.

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V.

THUS, also, the Scriptures constantly suppose Men capable of reasoning and judging, even in this state of Corruption; otherwise, all the Exhortations to the Exercise of our own Reason and Judgment, and all the Reproofs for neglecting to do so, would be vain and insignificant. Whatever of this kind is delivered to us by *Moses* and the Prophets, our Saviour and his Apostles, is directed to Men who liv'd after the Fall, and in this supposed state of the Corruption of human Reason.

BUT for the farther clearing of this Point, let us briefly see what Ground there is for this Opinion of the Depravity and Corruption of human Reason. If, as some hold, human Nature and all its Faculties were corrupted by the Sin of our first Parents, this Corruption was either the natural Effect of this first Sin, and followed necessarily from it, or else it was only the judicial Effect of it, and proceeded from the Will

S E R M. Will and Pleasure of God, who thought  
 V. fit to inflict this Punishment upon this Sin.  
 But neither of these Opinions is agreeable  
 to Reason.

I F we suppose this Corruption to be the *natural* Effect of this Sin, why should not the preceding Sins affect Men in like manner, and draw after them more and worse Evils of this Kind? Both our first Parents, and their Posterity, were guilty of many great and repeated Sins, and should therefore, after repeated Acts of Sins, grow worse and worse, and be more and more corrupted; and we, their degenerate Offspring, after such a long Train of Transgressions, should have contracted such a deep and universal Corruption, as would have ruin'd our Natures, and destroy'd all our Faculties, and scarce left us the Power of doing any Thing, no not so much as of committing Sin.

S I N F U L Habits may indeed be contracted by repeated acts of Sin, and our Nature be corrupted this Way; but the first Sin of *Adam* was but one single Transgression, and could, at most, produce but a sinful *Disposition* in him; it could not produce



duce a sinful *Habit* in him, much less in S E R M.  
his Posterity; indeed it is difficult to con- V.  
ceive how it could affect *them* at all: And  
therefore, since the Corruption of human  
Nature can be plainly accounted for other  
ways, we have no reason to admit of such  
an unintelligible Solution, and fetch his Cor-  
ruption as far as from *Adam's* Sin, when we  
may sooner find it in the voluntary Wicked-  
ness of his Posterity.

THOUGH Concupiscence be deriv'd from  
Parents to their Children, yet there is no  
occasion to seek for this as far as in *Adam*.  
The succeeding intermediate Parents might  
transmit this, whether they had it from  
*Adam* or no: And if they had this from  
*Adam*, it cannot be ascribed to original  
Corruption, or be look'd upon as any Part  
of it; because 'tis plain that this Concupif-  
cence was in *Adam* before his Fall, and was  
the occasion of it; and that which was the  
Cause could not be the Effect of the same  
Thing. If he had not an Appetite, and an  
Inclination to forbidden Things, he had  
been free from this Temptation, and could  
never have been drawn into this Sin. This  
Concupiscence then, being in Man before he  
fell,

S E R M. V. fell, cannot be ascrib'd to any Corruption he contracted by his Fall ; he could not be corrupted before he was so, nor was there any Thing criminal in this Concupiscence ; for though our first Parents had desired the forbidden Fruit, yet if they had abstained from it, they had not transgressed the divine Command, which did not forbid the bare Desire, but the actual Eating it. Nor were their Natures corrupted by this Transgression ; they were not, hereby, depriv'd of any of their natural Perfections with which they were created. They were indeed depriv'd of those gracious Privileges which they then enjoy'd, and which God farther designed them : But these were such as, by their own natural Strength, they could never have arrived at, and had no Reason to expect but from Acts of mere Grace and Favour in God. But this cannot properly be called a Corruption of human Nature ; it is only divesting it of some Things which, though it once had, did never naturally belong to it.

If, besides this, there be any other Corruption of our Nature of a moral kind which is commonly alledged ; 'tis not equi

in all Men : in some 'tis more, in others less. In some Men 'tis overcome by timely Care and due Study, and might be so in others. It appears and shews itself differently in different Persons, and is neither uniform nor universal; upon all which Accounts, it is evident, that it does not, by any natural and physical Efficacy, derive itself from *Adam*, as the Shape and Features, the Air and Mein of Children, are deriv'd to them from their Fathers.

If it be said, that this Corruption of human Nature proceeded from the positive Will and Decree of God; this is more than appears, either from the Sentence denounc'd against *Adam*, or any Punishment inflicted upon him: Neither of which, as far as the Scripture informs us, extended to his intellectual Capacities, but concern'd only his Body, and his temporal Felicity. By his Sin he forfeited that desirable State and Condition in which God had plac'd him, and would have continu'd to his Posterity, if he had not sinn'd. He was to have liv'd a long and happy Life here, free from any Pains of Body, or Uneasiness of Mind; till it should please God to translate him into a better

I. State,



S E R M. State. But instead of this, he was, for his  
 V. Sin, remov'd from this happy Condition,  
 turn'd out of Paradise, and subjected to Labour and Sorrow, Diseases, Sicknefs, and Death.

T H I S sad State descended to his Posterity; but then tho' they were Sufferers by *Adam's* Sin, they suffer'd nothing but what they were naturally liable to, and could not escape, but by an Act of extraordinary Grace and Favour; which as they had no claim to, so they had no injustice done them in their being debarr'd from it. They did not strictly suffer any thing, by way of positive Punishment, for *Adam's* Sin, as is suppos'd in the present Case. This would have been inconsistent with the Goodnefs and Justice of God, thus to have punish'd the innocent for the guilty.

I t does not therefore appear, that *Adam* impair'd any of his intellectual Abilities by his Fall; that he had less Reason or Judgment, was less knowing, or less free, than he was before. On the contrary, the Scripture intimates that he was in some Respects more wise and knowing after his Fall. And so indeed is every Sinner; tho', according to the Wise-  
 man,

man, *In much Knowledge of that Kind* S E R M.  
*there is much Grief; and he that encreases* V.  
*such Knowledge, encreaseth Sorrow.* And  
 as *Adam* contracted no intellectual Weak-  
 ness by his Fall, so he could not transmit  
 any such to his Posterity. Nor would it be  
 consistent with the Wisdom of God, any  
 more than with his Goodness and Justice,  
 for one single Transgression in *Adam*, to  
 condemn the whole Race of Mankind, whom  
 he made to serve and glorify him by their  
 Obedience, to an utter Incapacity of attaining  
 this End.

THE Scriptures have no where declar'd  
 that there is any such Corruption or Depre-  
 vation of our Souls by *Adam's* Sin: And  
 without very plain and exprefs Declarations  
 of Scripture, we should be very cautious of  
 entertaining any such Opinion, which con-  
 tradicts the plain and common Notions which  
 we have of the Justice, Wisdom, and Good-  
 ness of God.

BUT that there is no ground for any such  
 Opinion in Scripture, will quickly appear,  
 by taking a brief view of the chief Passages  
 which are usually alledg'd in favour of it.

THE first I shall mention, is *Gen. vi. 5.*

L. 2

where

SER M. where 'tis said, that *God saw that the*  
 V. *Wickedness of Man was great in the*  
*Earth, and that every Imagination of*  
*the Thoughts of his Heart was only evil*  
*continually.* But this is not said to be the  
 Effect of *Adam's Sin*; on the contrary, 'tis  
 ascrib'd to the voluntary Wickedness of his  
 Posterity: For so it is express'd at *Ver. 12.*  
*And God looked upon the Earth, and be-*  
*hold it was corrupt: for all Flesh had*  
*corrupted his Way upon the Earth.* Nor  
 is this to be understood of the whole Race of  
 Mankind, but only of the Men of that Ge-  
 neration, for whose Sins God drown'd the  
 World. Again in *Ch. viii. 21.* *The Lord*  
*said in his Heart, I will not again curse*  
*the Ground any more for Man's Sake; for*  
*the Imagination of Man's Heart is evil*  
*from his Youth.* And this too can be un-  
 derstood only of the voluntary Sin of *Adam's*  
 Posterity. For tho' the Heart, and the  
 Thoughts of the Heart, are here accus'd;  
 yet this does not prove any Corruption of  
 human Nature deriv'd from the first Pair.  
 For, as has been already observ'd, the  
 Thoughts of the Hearts of our first Pa-  
 rents were evil before they transgress'd the  
 divine



divine Command; they thought of their Sin before they committed it: But their Natures could not be corrupted by any foregoing Sin, because their's was the first. S E R M.  
V.

THE Corruption mention'd in these Places is not any original, natural, and unavoidable Corruption; but voluntary, acquir'd, and super-induc'd. Had it been any thing which Men themselves could not have hinder'd, we cannot suppose that God would have punish'd it so severely. For the Corruption here spoken of, is that for which God *repented that he had made Man*, and which provok'd him to *destroy all Flesh from off the Face of the Earth*; and therefore he himself could not be the Occasion of it, by inflicting it as a Punishment upon all Men for the Sin of the first.

Tis farther observable, that in the last Place I quoted, it is not said, *That the Imagination of Man's Heart is evil from his Youth*. For if this was the Meaning of the Place, the same Reason which at first mov'd God to punish Mankind, would be assign'd, even while it still continu'd in Force, for his not punishing them any more; which would be a very unaccountable Piece of

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Oeconomy. But this Absurdity will be avoided, if we read the Words, not as making two, but one Sentence only; and remember that the *Hebrew* Particle which we translate *for*, often signifies *although*; and then that *the Imagination of Man's Heart is evil from his Youth*, will not be assign'd as a Reason of God's forbearing to punish Man any more (for indeed it is none) but as an Aggravation, magnifying his Mercy and Kindness in this Forbearance: *Q. d.* Altho' Man should continue to be thus wicked, and *the Imagination of his Heart should be evil from his Youth*; yet I will not any more destroy the World upon this account. If we take the Words in this Sense, they are so far from being any Proof of this Corruption, that, on the contrary, they seem to suppose it possible for Men not to be thus wicked and corrupt.

THE next Passage I shall take notice of, is that of the *Psalmist*, *Pf. li. 5. Behold I was shapen in Wickedness, and in Sin bath my Mother conceiv'd me.* But neither can these Words be understood of an original Corruption which is universally spread o-

ver the whole Race of Mankind. What SERM.  
the *Plalmist* here says, he speaks only of V.  
himself, and not of other Men.

AND the Words may be taken figuratively, as an hyperbolical Expression, which the *Pfalmist* uses to aggravate and heighten his Wickedness: Such Expressions as these are very frequent in Scripture. Thus in *Psal. lviii. 4. The Ungodly are froward from their Mother's Womb: as soon as they are born they go astray, and speak Lies.* Which Words cannot be literally true, and therefore can mean no more than a very great Proneness and Readiness to Sin, very early and strong Inclinations to Vice and Wickedness.

IN like manner we are to understand that of *Isaiah, Ch. xlviii. 8. I knew that thou wouldst deal very treacherously, and wast call'd a Transgressor from the Womb.* And that of the Pharisees to the blind Man restor'd to his Sight, *John ix. 34. Thou wast altogether born in Sins.* None of which Places can have any reference to Adam's Sin, because they speak plainly of different and many Acts of Sin; whereas Adam's Sin was one, and terminated in  
L. 4 himself,



S E R M. himself, and cannot be call'd the Act of  
 V. his Posterity, but is usually distinguish'd  
 from the personal Transgressions of others.

B E S I D E S, how could this Corruption be made an Objection against wicked Men, since it was not in their Power to avoid it, and the Righteous themselves were subject to it as well as they? When the *Pharisees* told the blind Man, that he *was altogether born in Sin*; they could not mean that he deriv'd his Sin originally from *Adam*, and was a Sinner from his very Birth; for if this had been their Opinion, they could not but know it to be their own Case as well as his: But they meant only to disparage and reproach him, by calling him a very wicked Person.

F A R T H E R yet; if by being *Sinners from the Womb, and going astray as soon as they are born*, must be meant something innate and original: By the same Way of arguing we shall make several Virtues original and innate; such as Mercy and Compassion, Trust and Affiance in God, &c. since the same Expressions are us'd of these: which is manifestly contrary to the Notion of original Corruption.

tion. Thus *Job*, making a solemn Protestation of his Charity and Compassion to the Needy and Afflicted, has these words; *If I have withheld the Poor from their Desire, or have caus'd the Eyes of the Widow to fail, or have eaten my Mor- sel my self alone, and the Fatherless hath not eaten thereof: for from my Youth he, (i. e. the Poor and Fatherless) was brought up with me as with a Father; and I have guided her, (i. e. the Widow) from my Mother's Womb; Ch. xxxi. 18.* In like manner the *Psalmist* expresses his early Trust and Confidence in God; *Psal. xxii. 9, 10. But thou art he that took me out of the Womb; thou didst make me hope when I was upon my Mother's Breast. I was cast upon thee from the Womb: Thou art my God from my Mother's Belly.*

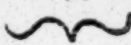
ANOTHER Passage which is urg'd to prove this universal Corruption, is *Rom. v. 12.* where this Assertion is suppos'd to be contain'd, That in *Adam* all have sinned. But the Apostle asserts nothing like this. The Words *ἐφ' ᾧ*, upon which this Opinion is here grounded, may be more truly render'd, as it is in our Translation, *for that,*  
or,

SERM. V. *or, for as much as*, all Men have sinned, without any reference to *Adam*, or his Sin. So this Phrase is us'd in other Places of Scripture, particularly 2 *Cor.* v. 4. not *for that* we would be uncloth'd.

THIS Interpretation is more easy and natural in itself, and makes the Apostle's Discourse very clear and intelligible; whereas, if *it* be refer'd to *Adam*, it must make a distinct Period, contrary to the usual manner of speaking, and affords a very hard and forc'd Construction.

BESIDES, in the next Verse but one it is said, that *Death reign'd from Adam unto Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the Similitude of Transgression, i. e.* who had not sinned so grievously and capitally as he had: which, as it implies that all Men had actually sinn'd, so it confirms the foregoing Interpretation, and shews that those Words need not relate to *Adam's* Sin, but to the actual Sins of every individual Person. And since all Men were Sinners, this justifies that universal Sentence of Death which pass'd upon all Men, and which all Men, as they were Sinners deserv'd; tho' all Men 'tis probable,



nable, would not have suffer'd, if *Adam's* S E R M. V.  
Sin had not introduc'd it into the World. 

By this we may understand those Words which we meet with in *Ver. 19.* of this Chapter. *That by one Man's Disobedience many were made Sinners;* which do not mean that we sinn'd in *Adam*, or incurr'd the Guilt and Punishment of his Sin; but that we fell into an evil State, and were treated as Sinners, upon occasion of *Adam's* Sin, and the Consequences of it. He brought Death and Misery into the World, which tho' they might naturally befall us as Men, and justly as Sinners; yet it is upon account of *Adam's* Sin, that our Sins are so far imputed to us as to bring these things upon us; tho' at the same Time we contract no Guilt, nor suffer any Punishment from *Adam's* Sin, but only from our own. Again in *Chap. vii.* of this *Epist. Ver. 23.* the Apostle says, *I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members.* With a great deal more, which we meet with in this Chapter to the same purpose.

Now,

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Now, besides other Interpretations which may fairly be put upon this Chapter, 'tis evident, since the Apostle no where says that this *Law in his Members* came by Nature, or was deriv'd from *Adam*, there is nothing in all this which concerns the present Question. Men may bring such a Law as the Apostle here speaks of upon themselves by vicious Habits and Customs, which Law is oftentimes more prevalent than Nature, and more difficult to overcome. And this Chapter contains a very lively Description of the great Power of evil Customs, and the slavish Condition of an habitual Sinner. But if we reject this Interpretation, and suppose, which indeed is most probable, that the Apostle places the Prevalency of this carnal *Law in his Members*, in his being under the Law of *Moses*, which discover'd the Sinfulness of several Actions which he did not before know to be Sins, without affording him those Helps to overcome them which the Gospel did: I say, whatever Interpretation we can fairly put upon this Chapter, there is nothing in it which favours the Opinion of original Corruption.

THERE

THERE is another Passage alledg'd SERM.  
V. in favour of this original Corruption of our Nature, which I shall just take notice of, in *Eph. ii. 3.* where the Apostle says, *That we were by Nature the Children of Wrath, even as others.* But neither do these Words prove any original Corruption derived from *Adam*, but refer to an acquir'd Corruption from our own actual Sins; as plainly appears from the Apostle's Discourse in this Place: And in this Sense the Word *Nature* is often used, for an acquired, super-induc'd Nature, arising from vicious Habits and Customs. By this means the *Ephesians* made themselves, as all Sinners do, *the Children of Wrath*, i. e. liable to Punishment. But if the Apostle, by *Nature*, meant what is usually meant by that Word in a strict and literal Sense, this was not the *Ephesians* Fault, but the Fault of him who made them such; and was not only the Case of the *Ephesians*, but of all others.

OR, by *Nature*, may be meant no more than that they were really and truly obnoxious to the Divine Displeasure upon account of their Sins. Thus the Word is used



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*used in Gal. iv. 8. Ye did service to them, who, by Nature, are no Gods, i. e. who in truth and reallity were no Gods. But in whatever Sense we take the Words, we cannot think that the Moment we are born, we are so depraved and corrupted, as to be unfit for any thing but Hell and Damnation. The Scripture gives a better account of Children, and declares them to be naturally innocent. Our Saviour tells us, That unless we become like unto little Children, we shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; Matt. xviii. 3. and at Ver. 10. he cautions us against despising one of these little ones: For I say unto you, that in Heaven their Angels do always behold the Face of my Father which is in Heaven. He distinguisheth them by peculiar Marks of Tendernefs and Affection, and told those that would have hindred them from being brought unto him, That of such was the Kingdom of Heaven; Matt. xix. 14. And 'tis St. Paul's Advice, 1 Cor. xiv. 20. That in Malice we should be Children,*

AFTER such Declarations as these in favour of Children, we cannot think so hardly

hardly of them, and of our own natural State and Condition, as the Opinion I am now considering would incline us. The Truth of the matter is, we are not born either with Virtues or Vices, but with Capacities for either; and which of these we shall most abound in, depends upon the Care which is at first taken of us, or which we afterwards take of ourselves. We cannot indeed, by our own natural Strength, arrive at the knowledge of those Truths, or the enjoyment of that Happiness which the Gospel has discover'd and propos'd to us: Neither could *Adam* do this, if he had not sinned. This being a supernatural End, requires other and higher Means than are naturally in our Power.

THESE are the chief Passages of Scripture which are usually produc'd to prove the original Corruption of human Nature; and if they should prove that there is in Man an Inclination or Proneness to Vice and Wickedness, of which, no Man wants any Proof, and which may be deriv'd from much nearer and more natural Causes than *Adam's* Sin; they do not prove our Reason to be so depraved and

cor-

S E R M. corrupted as to be unable to perform its  
 V. Office, and to judge of religious Matters.  
 It does not appear that *Adam* had less Knowledge and Wisdom, less Reason and Judgment, less Liberty and Freedom after, than before his Fall; he still retain'd whatever naturally belong'd to him as a Man, and so do we: And therefore, notwithstanding any Thing which we derived from him, we are still reasonable Creatures, and ought to make use of our own Reason and Judgment in all Things which concern us, but more especially in a matter of so great moment as that of Religion manifestly is.

B U T against this Use of Reason in religious Matters, which I have been contending for; there are other Passages of Scripture urg'd, which I shall also consider.

T H U S, for Instance, in *Rom. viii.* 'tis said, *That the carnal Mind is Enmity against God.* But this is nothing to the Purpose. The Apostle speaks nothing here in disparagement of the Mind or Reason of Man. For the Mind or Reason of Man is one thing



and *ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς* the carnal Mind, or as *SERMON*  
 it should be translated, *to be carnally mind-*  
*ed is another.* To be carnally minded signi-  
 fies turning the Bent of our Minds or sub-  
 jecting our Minds entirely to fulfilling the  
 Lusts of the Flesh. This proceeds from the  
 Devil, and is *Enmity against God*; but our  
 Reason proceeds from God, and to be go-  
 vern'd by that, is agreeable and acceptable  
 unto him. Our rational Faculties constitute  
 us Men; and to employ them a-right, and  
 upon their proper Objects, is to act like Men:  
 But our sensual Lusts and Appetites, when  
 too much cherish'd and indulg'd, are the  
 Debasement and Corruption of our Na-  
 tures, and degrade us into Beasts. So that  
 when Reason is over-power'd and born  
 down by Sense, when 'tis immers'd in the  
 Flesh, and swallow'd up by the brutal Part  
 of it, which is the true Meaning of the  
*carnal Mind*, then indeed it is no longer  
 that Reason which is capable of judging,  
 and which we have already describ'd.

ANOTHER Passage alleg'd to shew  
 the Weakness and Insufficiency of human  
 Reason to judge of religious Matters, is,  
 1 Cor. i. 19, 20. where the Apostle, quot-

M

ing

SER. M. ing *Isaiah*, says, *It is written, I will destroy the Wisdom of the Wise, and bring to nothing the Understanding of the Proud. Where is the Wise? Where is the Scribe? Where is the Disputer of this World? Hath not God made foolish the Wisdom of this World?*

BUT neither does this Passage contain any thing against Reason, or which should discourage us from making the best Use of it we can.

FOR the Apostle's Design here is to take off the *Corinthians* from glorying in those false Apostles who oppos'd him, and endeavour'd to undermine his Credit among them. To which Purpose he tells them that neither any Advantage of Extraction, nor Skill in the Learning of the *Jews*, nor in the Philosophy and Eloquence of the *Gentiles* (Qualifications which these false Apostles pretended to, and magnify'd themselves thereupon) was that for which God chose Men to be Preachers of the Gospel. But those, whom he made choice of for overturning the mighty and the learned were plain and illiterate Men. He means that the Gospel Dispensation, and the Me-

method which God has there laid down for the Salvation of Mankind, is what no human Reason, or natural Light could ever have discover'd. But since it is discover'd, great Numbers have been brought to the Belief and Entertainment of it; and all, whose Minds are duly prepared to consider things impartially, and to receive the Truth, must own it to be an eminent Instance of the divine Power and Wisdom, a wise and Powerful Means to reform the World.

So that the Apostle's Reasoning amounts to this, That since the World by their natural Parts and Improvements did not attain to a right and saving Knowledge of God; God, by the preaching of the Gospel, which at first seem'd *Foolishness* to them, was pleas'd to communicate that Knowledge to those who were willing to receive it. The *Jews*, to make any Doctrine go down with them, requir'd extraordinary Signs of the Power of God to accompany it. And nothing would please the nice Pallates of the learned *Greeks* but *Wisdom*. But tho' the preaching of a crucify'd Messiah was a *Scandal to the Jews*,



S E R M.

V.

*and Foolishness to the Greeks,* yet it prov'd, in the event, to be what they both sought; for both *Jew* and *Gentile*, when they were call'd, found the Messiah to be the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.

So that the most that can be inferr'd from this Place is, that the Gospel Dispensation was not discoverable by human Reason: But it does not therefore follow, that, after it is reveal'd to us, we are not to use our Reason in examining into it, and judging of it, and applying it to ourselves.

AGAIN, 1 Cor. ii. 14. The Apostle tells us, *that the natural Man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: For they are Foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discern'd.*

WHERE the Apostle still pursues the same Design, and shews the *Corinthians*, that they had no reason to glory in their Teachers; because the Knowledge of the Gospel was not attainable by our natural Parts, however they were improv'd by Arts and Philosophy, but was wholly owing to Revelation.

THE

THE *animal Man* and the *spirituals* S E R M.  
*Man* are here, by the Apostle, oppos'd V.  
to one another. The one signifies a Man  
that has no higher Principles to build upon  
than those of natural Reason. The other  
a Man that founds his Faith and Religion  
on divine Revelation. The Apostle says  
that *the natural Man receiveth not the*  
*things of the Spirit of God*, or, as it is ex-  
perts'd in the foregoing Verse, *spiritual*  
*things*, by which he means the unsearch-  
able Counsels of God, reveal'd by the Spi-  
rit of God: *For they are Foolishness unto*  
*him, neither can he know them, because*  
*they are spiritually discern'd: i. e.* A Man  
who has no other Help but his own na-  
tural Faculties, how much soever improv'd  
by human Arts and Sciences, cannot re-  
ceive the Truths of the Gospel which are  
made known by another Principle only,  
*viz. the Spirit of God* revealing them, and  
therefore seem foolish and absurd to such  
a Man; nor can he, by the bare Use of  
his natural Faculties, and the Principles of  
human Reason, ever come to the Know-  
ledge of them, because it is by the study-

S E R M. ing divine Revelation alone that we can at-  
 V. tain this Knowledge.

IF this be the true Sense of the Place, all that can be infer'd from hence is, that Revelation can discover more than Reason; which none ever deny'd: But it does not follow from hence, that all Use of Reason is to be laid aside in those things which Revelation discovers; for Revelation does not make us irrational in those things which it discovers to us, but proposes them to our Reason, and allows us to exercise our Reason about them.

BUT if by *natural Man*, we understand an *animal Man*, as the Word *ζωικός* may import, it is still plainer that here is nothing said against the Use of right Reason; for an *animal Man* may be taken in a vicious Sense, for one who leads a mere animal and sensual Life; who relishes nothing but the Pleasures of the Body, and values nothing so much as the things of this World. Such an one will not easily be brought to embrace the Truths of the Gospel. They will be *Foolishness unto him*. He will judge it foolish to forego a present for a future Good, to quit what he has in hand for something in Reversion. But

even



even this Man is capable of Reasoning and S E R M.

Judging for himself; otherwise *the things of* V.  
*God* could not be said to be *Foolishness unto*

*him*. He knows something of them, or else he could determine nothing about them. He passes a wrong Judgment indeed, because he is led away by his vicious Pleasures and Passions: And for that he is justly blameable, but not for making use of his Reason and Judgment.

AGAIN, in the third of this *Epist.* 18, 19, 20. *ver.* *Let no Man deceive himself; if any Man among you seemeth to be wise in this World, let him become a Fool, that he may be wise: For the Wisdom of this World is Foolishness with God: For it is written, he taketh the Wise in their own Craftiness. And again, the Lord knoweth the Thoughts of the Wise, that they are but vain.*

AND here again the Apostle pursues the same Design which he does in some of those Places which I have already examin'd, which is to draw the *Corinthians* off from their Leader, who had set himself up in Opposition to the Apostle: And 'tis the Cunning and Craftiness which he had us'd to compass

SER M. his Ends, and not true Wisdom, not human  
 V. Reason and private Judgment, which the  
 Apostle here speaks against.

AGAIN in 2 Cor. x. 4, 5, &c. (*For the Weapons of our Warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong Holds:*) *casting down Imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the Knowledge of God, and bringing into Captivity every Thought to the Obedience of Christ.*

WHERE the Apostle has the same thing again in View: He opposes his own Simplicity and Honesty to the artful Eloquence of his Adversary. He does not speak of destroying his own Counsels, but of defeating the Designs of his Opponent; not of bringing his own Reason and Understanding into Captivity, but of subduing his Adversary's; which was not to be done without Reason, but by Reason, by shewing that he had more Reason and better Arguments on his side, than he that oppos'd him. These are the *Weapons* which the Apostle us'd in this *Warfare*, the Principles of Reason and Revelation. These were not *carnal Weapons*, they were not Principles of Sense, such as relish'd bodily

ly Pleasures, and respect'd only the Riches, S E R M. V.  
 and Honours, and other Advantages of this  
 Life: But they were *spiritual*, such as re-  
 garded the Interest of the Soul, and the  
 Happiness of another Life: Principles so far  
 from being opposite or contrary to Reason,  
 that they carry in them the best and highest  
 Reason in the World. There is no more  
 Opposition between these Principles and Rea-  
 son, than there is between Weapons and the  
 Hand that uses them. As the Hand is to  
 grasp and direct the Weapons, so is Reason  
 to comprehend these Principles, and manage  
 them to the best Advantage.

BESIDES, the Apostle does not blame the  
 Use of Reason and Understanding in his Ad-  
 versary, but the Abuse of it, in that it *ex-  
 alted itself against the Knowledge of God*,  
 and oppos'd the Purity and Simplicity of the  
 Gospel.

THESE are the chief Texts which are  
 brought to shew the Weakness and Insuffi-  
 ciency of human Reason in general, and how  
 unfit it is to be set up as a Judge in religious  
 Matters.

BUT besides these, there are other Texts  
 of Scripture alledg'd against the Use of Rea-  
 son



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son in interpreting Scripture for ourselves, and determining the Sense and Meaning of it by our own Understanding. The first Passage I shall take notice of is that which we meet with in 2 *Pet.* i. 20, 21. *Knowing this first, that no Prophecy of the Scripture is of any private Interpretation. For the Prophecy came not in old Time by the Will of Man: But holy Men of God spake as they were mov'd by the Holy Ghost.* From whence some would infer, that we cannot understand the Meaning of Scripture without the particular Gift and extraordinary Assistance of that Spirit which indited it; and that the Spirit excludes all Use of our own Reason in this Matter.

BUT neither of these Points can be concluded from this Text. For the Apostle does not speak here of all Scripture in general, but only of the Prophecies of the Old Testament, which foretold things that were not to come to pass till a long Time after, till the Times of the Messiah. He does not speak of all the inspir'd Writers of the Old Testament, but only of the Prophets, and shews what he had before said in his first Epistle, *Ch.* i. 10, 11. *Of which Salvation the Prophets*

*Prophets have enquir'd, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the Grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of Time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified before hand the Sufferings of Christ, and the Glory that should follow.* The Meaning of which is that they did not understand, nor could they interpret their own Prophecies, and were ignorant most of all of the Time when they should be fulfilled.

So that *the private Interpretation* of Prophecy here mention'd, by which is meant the Prophets Interpretation of their own Prophecies, is not oppos'd to the Illumination of the Spirit, but to the Understandings of other Men; especially those to whom the Gospel was more plainly reveal'd, or who liv'd under the Gospel, and might therefore understand the Meaning of those Prophecies, tho' the Prophets who utter'd them did not.

NEITHER is all Interpretation, and all Understanding of the Scripture here deny'd to the Prophets themselves, but only a thorough and compleat Knowledge of the hidden and mystical Sense of it, as it related to the New Testament and the Gospel Covenant.

But

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But from this particular Case no general Argument can be drawn, to prove that no Man can, by the Help of his own Reason, arrive at any Degree of Knowledge and Understanding in the Meaning of any Part of Scripture whatever. This indeed is endeavour'd to be prov'd from the last of the two Verses now quoted. *For the Prophecy came not in old Time by the Will of Man: But holy Men of God spake as they were mov'd by the Holy Ghost.* Which Words some would understand as an Argument whereby the Apostle confirms his first Assertion, that *no Prophecy of the Scripture is of any private Interpretation, because it came not by the Will of Man, but holy Men of old spake as they were mov'd by the Holy Ghost.* From whence they argue thus, that since all Scripture is given by Inspiration of God, no Man can understand and interpret it by his own Reason and Judgment, but only by the Assistance of the Spirit of God.

BUT this Argument is not conclusive, because, 1. There is no Occasion why this Verse should contain a Reason for what was said in the foregoing Verse. Nor 2. why this should be the Reason which it contains.

This



This Verse seems rather to contain an An-S E R M.  
 swer to a tacit Objection which might be V.  
 made against what the Apostle said in the  
 foregoing Verse. For if any one should have  
 objected that Prophecy was of *private In-*  
*terpretation*, because it came *by the Will of*  
*Man*: The ready Way to answer this would  
 be by denying the Assumption, which the A-  
 postle does, when he tells us that *Prophecy*  
*came not by the Will of Man, but holy Men*  
*of old spake as they were mov'd by the Holy*  
*Ghost*. This may be the Meaning of this  
 Verse. It may contain an Answer to this  
 tacit Objection; and Answers are not design'd  
 for a direct Reason of what we assert, but  
 only to shew the Weakness of what is ob-  
 jected against us.

AND yet, 2. If it was the Apostle's De-  
 sign in this Verse to confirm what he had said  
 in the foregoing, It will not follow that this  
 is the Reason whereby he confirms it, *viz.*  
 That Prophecies proceed not from the Will  
 of Man, but from the Holy Ghost: But that  
 those Prophets were so forcibly mov'd and  
 over-power'd by the Holy Ghost, that nei-  
 ther the Time nor Place, neither the Manner  
 nor Measure of their prophesying was at  
 their

S E R M. V. their own Command: They could not prophesy when, or where, or what they pleas'd, but they utter'd things without their knowing or thinking of them, without, and many times against their Will and Consent. But this was not the Case of the Apostles, and and other inspir'd Persons under the New Testament; nor yet always of the Prophets of the Old Testament; but only when they utter'd those Prophecies which the Apostle here refers to. In other Cases the Spirit of God did often accommodate itself to the Will of those whom it inspir'd. *The Spirits of the Prophets are subject to the Prophets.* So St. Paul tells the *Corinthians* in his second Epistle, *Chap. xiv. 32.* where by *Spirits* must be understood the extraordinary Communications of the Holy Spirit, which the Apostle assures them they were so far Masters of, that they might regulate and order them in such a Manner as should tend most to the Edification of their Assemblies. They could, for instance, *prophesy one by one*, Verse 31. They could speak, or leave off speaking, as they pleas'd. They could arrive at any Degree of necessary Knowledge they had a mind to by the Help

Help of the Spirit, and could pursue this or S E R M.  
that Subject and Enquiry as far as they V.  
thought fit.

THESE things consider'd, what was before said is very evident, that these Words of the Apostle cannot be understood of all Scripture, and of all Interpretation of Scripture, so as to exclude all Men from all Manner of Knowledge and Understanding of Scripture by their own Reason and Judgment.

BESIDES, even this extraordinary Communication of the Spirit did not exclude all Use of Reason, but only in some Men, at some certain Times, and in some particular Respects; and this too not upon account of any Inconsistency there is between the divine Spirit and human Reason, but only because the Spirit of God, in old time, did not so clearly reveal some things as the Men of those Times could have wish'd, and as they were afterwards reveal'd: Whence it comes to pass that many things are very plain and intelligible under the new Covenant, which were not so under the old.

WHEREFORE to conclude this Point, Tho' we should suppose the Apostle to reason  
here



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here as some would have him, it does not follow that we can understand nothing at all of Scripture without the particular Help of the Spirit of God; but only that we cannot understand some things so perfectly and thoroughly without it. Nor does it follow that in those Instances where the Assistance of the Holy Spirit is necessary, all Use of Reason is to be laid aside; but only that Reason in its bare natural State is not sufficient for this End, but must be assisted and enlighten'd by the Spirit of God; which Benefit the most wise and Rational Man will never disown or refuse.

A N D yet after all this, these Words are capable of another Sense: And when the Apostle says that *no Prophecy of the Scripture is of any private Interpretation*, he may mean no more than this, that the Prophets were influenc'd and inspir'd by the Holy Ghost, and that their Prophecies are to be look'd upon and interpreted as the Voice of that Holy Spirit, and not as any human private Conceptions.

B U T whatever fair Construction we put upon the Words, they contain nothing against the Use of our own Reason and Judgment in interpreting Scripture.

S E R M.



## SERMON VI.

More Objections out of Scripture, against *Free-thinking*, answer'd.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*



HO' there is nothing more rea-<sup>SERM.</sup>  
sonable in itself, or more neces-<sup>VI.</sup>  
sary to the very Life and Being  
of true Religion, than that eve-  
ry Man should be left to the free Exercise  
of his own private Judgment; yet several  
N Objections

178 *More Objections out of Scripture,*

S E R M. Objections have been rais'd against this Prin-  
VI. ciple, some from Reason, and some from  
Scripture.

THE Objections of the first Sort are grounded upon a Supposition of Reason's being an incompetent Judge in religious Matters, and upon the mischievous Effects and Consequences of Mens exercising their Reason upon these Matters. Those of the other Sort are drawn from such Texts of Scripture as seem to prohibit this Use of Reason in general, or more particularly the Exercise of it in studying and interpreting Scripture for ourselves.

M O S T of these Objections I have consider'd, and endeavour'd to answer in some of my last Discourses. And before I proceed any farther, I shall make two or three brief Remarks upon what has been already said.

C O N C E R N I N G those Objections against that Use of Reason in religious Matters for which I have been contending, and which are drawn from the Principles of Reason, I observe that they cannot be urg'd with any Consistency in the present Case. For if Reason was originally in itself, or is in its present State of Degeneracy and Corruption, an  
incom-



incompetent Judge in religious Matters; how S E R M.  
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can I depend upon that Reasoning which I use to prove this. My Reason may betray its Weakness, and deceive me even here; and the Arguments which I think I urge with so much Weight, may be inconclusive, and have nothing in them. Whenever we argue or dispute upon any Point, we always appeal to Reason, and suppose it to be a proper Judge, and able to determine the Controversy, to discover on which Side the Truth lies, and to separate it from Error. If Reason be incapable of this, 'tis in vain to reason at all, or endeavour to prove any thing by Reason, even this, that we are able to prove nothing. We can object nothing against the Judgment of sound Reason but what answers and overthrows itself, and involves us in a manifest Contradiction. For at the same Time that we reason against Reason's being a Judge, we do in Effect set it up as a Judge, and appeal to it.

WHATSOEVER any Man alledges to me against Reason's being made a Judge, is either agreeable to my Reason, or it is not: If it be, he makes Reason a Judge: If it be not, he disputes in vain against Reason. For the

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End of Disputation is to bring over others to our Opinion by proper Arguments: But this cannot be done, unless our Arguments be agreeable to his Reason with whom we dispute.

AGAIN, either we suppose the Person with whom we dispute to understand the Reasons we urge for his Conviction, or not: If the first; we own Reason to be a Judge: If the second; we dispute to no purpose, and may as profitably entertain the Blind and the Deaf with Sounds and Colours. He that argues against this Use of Reason, thinks that he reasons either rightly or wrongly. If he thinks he reasons rightly, how can he condemn the Judgment of Reason? If wrongly, how can he hope to convince others by that which he does not believe himself? Thus vain and inconsistent is it, to reason against the Use of Reason; to endeavour to prove that to be an incompetent Judge without which we can judge of nothing, nor prove any thing, but must sit down in utter Ignorance and Darknefs.

AGAIN, concerning those Objections against the Use of Reason in religious Matters which are drawn from Scripture, and parti-

cularly

cularly those which are urg'd from Scripture SERM.  
VI.  
against the Use of private Judgment in inter-  
preting Scripture; I observe, that the Scrip-  
tures were wrote for the general Use and  
Instruction of all Mankind, and therefore all  
Men are oblig'd to the diligent Reading and  
Study of them, and to use their best Reason  
and understanding in discovering their true  
Sense and Meaning; and if Men be deny'd  
this Use of Scripture, or this Use of their  
Reason in understanding Scripture, they may  
as well be depriv'd of the Scriptures them-  
selves. The Apostle reckon'd it a great Ad-  
vantage to *Timothy*, that from a Child he  
had known the holy Scriptures, which  
were able to make him wise unto Salva-  
tion, through Faith which is in Christ  
Jesus. 2 Tim. ii. 15. and then adds a  
general Character and Commendation of  
Scripture: *All Scripture*, says he, *is given  
by Inspiration of God, and is profitable for  
Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for  
Instruction in Righteousness; that the Man  
of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnish'd  
unto all good Works.* But tho' we read the  
Scriptures, or hear them read never so often,  
they will not serve any of these good



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Ends and Purposes, unless we bring our Reason and Understanding along with us to judge of their true Sense and Meaning.

THERE is nothing so absurd but may be, and has been, attempted to be prov'd and defended by Scripture, and this for want of Mens using their own Reason and Judgment. If we take those Passages in a literal which are to be understood in a figurative Sense, what gross Conceptions will this give us of God, and what strange Notions shall we form to ourselves of several religious Matters? If it be said, that such Conclusions are manifestly wrong, because these Expressions are to be taken in a figurative Sense; I ask, how we can know which are to be taken in a literal, and which in a figurative Sense, but by the Use of our Reason? All Discourses whatever are directed to our Reason, and 'tis by the Help of this alone, that we are capable of understanding any even the plainest Matters.

AGAIN, when Scripture is urg'd against the Use of our own Reason and Judgment in interpreting Scripture, I ask those who thus argue, how they know that the Passages of Scripture, which they alledge against this

Use

Use of Reason, are pertinent, and prove what S E R M.  
VI.  
they are brought for? This can be known only by the Help of their own Reason and Judgment; and if they rely upon their own Sense and Reason in interpreting these Texts of Scripture, why may they not as well do so in others? and make the same Use of Reason in reading the Scriptures which they do in studying other Books, since the Scriptures were wrote for the same End which other Books are, the Instruction and Improvement of Mankind?

THUS, we see, that whatever Objections can be urg'd against the Use of Reason in religious Matters, or more particularly against the Use of Reason in interpreting Scripture for ourselves, contradict and overthrow themselves, and do really establish that Use of Reason which they attempt to undermine. Indeed, if there be any Force in Objections of this Kind, there is an End of all Discourse and Argument whatever, and every Man must be left to the Enjoyment of his own Opinions, however erroneous or absurd, since upon this Supposition that Reason is to be discarded, tis in vain to endeavour to convince him.

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I have already consider'd some of those Passages of Scripture which are urg'd against the Use of Reason in interpreting Scripture. Many of the Objections drawn from these Scriptures are grounded upon this Supposition that they contain things which are not proper Objects of Reason, but so far above our Comprehension that we cannot pretend to exercise our Reason about them. [This is a Point which I may take Occasion to handle more distinctly in the Remainder of these Discourses.] At present I shall proceed to consider some more of those Texts of Scripture which are brought either against the general Use of Reason in Religious Matters, or the particular Use of it in interpreting Scripture.

THAT of the Wise Man *Prov. xxv. 27.* has been alledg'd against Enquiries into religious Matters, as if the Knowledge of such things was too excellent for us, and like the Brightness of the Sun, was apt to dazle, confound, and blind those who fix'd their Eyes attentively upon it. For so this Passage runs in the vulgar Translation, *Scrutator Majestatis opprimetur a gloria.* He that endeavours to take a near View of the Majesty of God



God shall be oppress'd and confounded with S E R M.  
his Glory; alluding, as is suppos'd, to those VI.  
Passages which tell us that 'tis impossible to  
*see God's Face, and to behold his Glory,*  
and which represent him as *dwelling in*  
*Light* inaccessible, *which no Man can ap-*  
*proach*; and the like.

BUT, first, this Mischief can befall none  
but the careless and imprudent; and so this  
Place is understood by those who take it in  
that Sense which the vulgar Translation puts  
upon it. We may use the most dangerous  
things, and reap a great deal of Benefit from  
them, if we manage them after a prudent  
Manner. We may handle Fire by proper  
Instruments without being burnt; and view  
the Sun in its greatest Splendor through a fit  
Medium. In like manner if we contemplate  
divine things, and endeavour after the Know-  
ledge of them in the Use of those Means  
which both Reason and Revelation prescribe,  
and proceed with all Humility and Discre-  
tion, there can be no Danger in such En-  
quiries.

WHAT is there in divine Matters, as far  
as we are concern'd to know them, which  
is too hard for our Reason, or can be any  
Prejudice

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Prejudice to it when exercis'd about it? If we instance in the incomprehensible Nature and Majesty of God, his infinite excellencies and Perfections: This is nothing to the Purpose. For tho' it be absolutely requir'd of us, as the Condition of eternal Life, *to know God, and his Son Jesus Christ whom he hath sent*; yet we are not oblig'd to a perfect Knowledge of the inmost Nature and Essence of God, but only to know the Relation he bears to us, as our Creator and supreme Lord and Governour, his Will and his Designs concerning us, the Promises he has made us, and the Precepts he has given us, that we may obey the one in order to obtain the other. So much Knowledge of the Nature of God and Christ, as will help forward this End, is necessary, and so much of this we may learn from Scripture; and this will not prejudice our Reason, but make it more compleat and perfect. But if any one should endeavour after more Knowledge of this Kind than is reveal'd to him, and attempt to be wise above what is written, he may experience the Truth of what *Solomon* says in this Sense, and be oppress'd with that Glory which he endeavours to see through.

But

BUT, secondly, the Words in the original have quite another Sense, and only re-  
 prove Men for searching out and proclaiming  
 their own Glory. For so the Verse runs  
 in our Translation, and the Original will  
 bear that Sense. *It is not good to eat much  
 Honey: So for Men to search their own  
 Glory, is not Glory.* This indeed is inter-  
 preted by the \* Rabbies of the Study of di-  
 vine things, which whosoever endeavours to  
 understand more perfectly than they are re-  
 veal'd to us, will soon find himself out of  
 his Depth. We must not therefore, as they  
 advise us, be too minute in our Enquiries  
 into the Nature and Essence of these things,  
 what they are in themselves, and after what  
 Manner they exist, since such curious En-  
 quiries can be of no Benefit or Credit to us,  
 because they are beyond the Reach of human  
 Understanding. But if we take the Words  
 in this Sense, they do not, as I have shewn,

\* Nimio plus mellis comedere non est bonum: Hoc intelli-  
 gendum est de studio rerum sanctarum. Destituetur enim qui  
 ejusmodi studiis se immiscebit. Non itaque est inquirendum quæ  
 aut qualia sunt, nec eorum Excellentiam curiosè indagare gloriam  
 parit; cum ea penitiùs cognoscere humano intellectui non con-  
 cedatur, R. Levi Ben Gersom in Loc.

forbid



188 *More Objections out of Scripture,*

S E R M. VI. forbid that Use of Reason in religious Mat-  
ters which I have been asserting.

I have already examin'd several Passages in St. *Paul's* Epistles, which have been urg'd against the Use of Reason in religious Mat-  
ters, and have shewn that they mean no more than this, that Men could never, by the bare Use of Reason, arrive at those Discoveries which the Gospel has made: That Revelation has open'd to us such a new Scene of things, as *Eye hath not seen, nor Ear heard, neither have enter'd into the Heart of Man to conceive*; such Knowledge as was far above the Wisdom of this World, and the Princes of this World; such as was not in the least the Product of human Discovery, Parts or Learning, but was deriv'd wholly from what God had taught by his Spirit in the sacred Scriptures, and was not to be ascrib'd to the Skill or Abilities of Men, as the Authors of it, but to be receiv'd as a Doctrine coming from God alone. This is the Apostle's Design in 1 *Cor. ii.* where he distinguishes the *Wisdom of this World* from the *Wisdom of God*; meaning by the one, such Knowledge, Arts and Sciences, as was attainable by Man's natural Parts and Facul-

ties,

ties, such as Man's Wit could find out, cultivate and improve, and the Princes of this World encourage and endeavour to propagate; by the other, such Knowledge as was built on the Authority of God alone, and was deriv'd wholly from the Revelation of his Spirit in the Scriptures, and could be had no other Way,

THIS is what the Apostle means in *Ver. 1. &c.* of this *Chap.* where speaking of those things which the Gospel has made known to us, he says, *That God hath reveal'd them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things; yea, the deep things of God.* i. e. those Secrets of the divine Wisdom and Counsel which are beyond the Reach of our Abilities to discover. *For what Man knoweth the things of a Man, save the Spirit of a Man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no Man, but the Spirit of God.* i. e. As no Man knoweth what is in the Mind of another Man, but only the Spirit of the Man himself that is in him: So much less doth any Man know or can discover the Thoughts and Counsels of God, but only the Spirit of God. But when the Spirit of God hath reveal'd these things unto

S E R M. VI. unto us, they are reveal'd to our Understandings, and become fit Objects for the Exercise of our Reason. And this the Apostle intimates at *Ver. 15. He that is spiritual judgeth all things. i. e.* He that lays the Foundation of his Knowledge of these things in divine Revelation, can judge what is, and what is not the Doctrine of the Gospel and Salvation; he can judge who is, and who is not a good Minister and Preacher of the Word of God; what Doctrines are, and what are not agreeable to the Christian Religion. He is able to put in practice this Precept in the Text, of *proving all things; and holding fast that which is good.*

T H E R E are other Passages of Scripture produc'd against the Use of Reason in religious Matters, which, when they are examin'd, will be found to be not against such Use of Reason, but only against Reasoning from such Principles as belong only to natural things, and applying them to divine Matters. But this is manifestly an Abuse of Reason, and extending it beyond its proper Province.

T H U S, for Instance, when God promised *Abraham* a Son; as that Promise was to be fulfill'd in an extraordinary Manner, so the  
Objection



Objection which *Sarah* made against it, from S E R M.  
the common and ordinary Course of Nature, VI.  
was of no Force, and therefore her Reason-  
ing after this Manner was reprov'd by the  
Angel. *Gen. xviii. 10, 11, 12.* But *Abraham*  
reason'd better in this Case, and the Scrip-  
tures give us the highest Commendation of  
his Faith upon account of the Reasonable-  
ness of it, and has recommended it as a Pat-  
tern to all succeeding Generations. For  
thus the Apostle describes this Act of *Abra-*  
*ham's* Faith, *Rom. iv. 18, &c.* *Who a-*  
*gainst Hope believ'd in Hope, that he might*  
*become the Father of many Nations; ac-*  
*ording to that which was spoken, so shall*  
*thy Seed be. And being not weak in Faith,*  
*he consider'd not his own Body now dead,*  
*when he was about an hundred Years old,*  
*neither yet the Deadness of Sarah's Womb.*  
*He stagger'd not at the Promise of God*  
*through Unbelief; but was strong in Faith,*  
*giving Glory to God: And being fully per-*  
*suaded that what he had promis'd, he*  
*was able also to perform.*

AGAIN, when the Children of Israel  
were in the Ears of the Lord, saying  
*who shall give us Flesh to eat?* And God had  
promis'd

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promis'd to give them Flesh to the full. *Moses* was guilty of the same wrong Reasoning when he reply'd, *The People amongst whom I am, are Six Hundred Thousand Footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them Flesh that they may eat a whole Month. Shall the Flocks and the Herds be slain for them, to suffice them? Or shall all the Fish of the Sea be gather'd together for them, to suffice them? And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's Hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my Word shall come to pass unto thee, or not. Numb. xi. 18, &c.* God design'd to do that after a miraculous Manner, and by his own immediate Power; which *Moses* thought was to be brought about by the Use of common and ordinary Means.

ANOTHER Instance of the like Nature we meet with in *Chap. xx.* of this Book, *Ver. 11, 12.* when *Moses* fetch'd Water out of the stony Rock to supply the People with Drink.

THIS false Way of reasoning deceiv'd *Naaman* the Leper, and made him refuse at first to use those Means which the Prophet had prescrib'd for his Cure: He could not apprehend

apprehend what Virtue there was in the Waters of *Jordan* more than in other Rivers, and was therefore unwilling to be at the trouble of going to wash in them. But his Mistake lay in this, that he thought the Cure must be perform'd by natural Means, which was to be effected in a miraculous Manner. 2 *Kings* v. 11, &c.

IN *Chap.* vii. of this Book, we have another Instance of the same Nature. The City of *Samaria* was besieged by the *Syrians*, and reduc'd to the utmost Extremity. The Prophet foretels a very speedy and incredible Plenty; which as there was no Prospect of in the present Circumstances, so it was thought altogether impossible. *Behold*, says one, *If the Lord would make Windows in Heaven, might this thing be?* But this was reasoning according to the Measures of human Probability, about a thing which was brought to pass by the divine Power; for God struck a Terror into the *Syrians*, which made them quit their Camp, and leave all their Stores and Treasures behind them, whereby the Prophet's Words were accomplish'd.



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*Jews* run into, with regard to our Saviour's Knowledge and Understanding. For when *he taught them in their Synagogue in so much that they were astonish'd; they said, whence hath this Man this Wisdom, and these mighty Works? Is not this the Carpenter's Son? Is not his Mother call'd Mary? And his Brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his Sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this Man all these things?* Mat. xiii. 54, &c. They knew our Saviour's Birth and Education to be such, as made it impossible for him, by the common and ordinary Methods, to acquire those Talents they found him possessed of; and their Error consisted in this that they took him to be a meer Man, and that he had no other than human Means to make use of.

HIS Disciples were often so deceiv'd, when he propos'd to feed the Multitudes who follow'd him. There being no visible Supply of Food for such great Numbers; they often ask the Question, whence they should have it; and endeavour to dissuade him from such Designs, as wholly impracticable; and so in-

deed

deed they would have been, if recourse must <sup>S E R M.</sup>  
have been had to none but the common and <sup>VI.</sup>  
ordinary Means. *Mat.* xv. 32, &c.

THIS false Reasoning, was the Foundation of that Objection which the *Saducees* made against the Resurrection in *Mat.* xxii. 23, &c. They argued from this Life to another, and thought that we should be in the same Circumstances in another World, which we are in here. Whereas, if they had consider'd how different our future State and Condition will be, from that which we now subsist in, there would have been no Ground for any such Objection as they made.

The same wrong Reasoning appears in the Objections which were made against the Conception and Birth of *John* the Baptist, and our Saviour; which, as they were foretold and promis'd immediately by God, so it was no just Exception against them, that they were beyond and above the common Course of Nature.

SUCH Instances as these are brought by some to weaken the Authority of Reason. But this is not a right Use of Reason, which consists in judging of every thing by its pro-

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per Principles, or at least by such general Principles as include these. The not observing this Rule was the Occasion of these Mistakes, and is that Fault or Error in Reasoning, which Logicians call *μετάβασις ἐς ἄλλο γένος*, and is included in those enticing Words against which the Apostle warns the *Colossians*, in *Chap. ii. Ver. 4.* of that Epistle. And this I say, lest any Man should beguile you, *παρελογίζηται*, with enticing Words.



SER-





## SERMON VII.

That the Scriptures do suppose, encourage, and enjoin the Use of our Reason in Matters of Religion.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*



HAVING taken a View of the principal Passages of Scripture, which are usually alledg'd against that Use of Reason in religious Matters which I have been contending for: It will be necessary, in justice to this Argument,

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VII.

ment, to consider those Passages also which not only suppose, but encourage and enjoin the Use of Reason in religious Matters, and reprove Men for neglecting to do so.

INDEED the whole Tenor of Scripture, both of the Old and New Testament, supposes us to be rational Creatures, and that we make use of our own Reason and Understanding in judging for ourselves, or at least, that 'tis our Duty to do so, and that we are highly blameable whenever we do otherwise. This is plainly imply'd, in that Complaint which *Moses* made of the *Jewish* Nation, and the earnest Desire he expresses for their true Interest. *They are a Nation void of Counsel, neither is there any Understanding in them. Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter End.* Deut. xxxii. 28, 29.

THUS the Idolaters are reprov'd for not making use of their Reason, and their Sin is ascrib'd to this Neglect. *They have not known, nor understood: For he hath shut their Eyes, that they cannot see; and their Hearts that they cannot understand. And none considereth in his Heart, neither is there Knowledge nor Understanding to say*

I have burnt Part of it in the Fire, yea, <sup>S E R M.</sup>  
 also I have baked Bread upon the Coals <sup>VII.</sup>  
 thereof; I have roasted Flesh, and eaten it,  
 and shall I make the residue thereof an  
 Abomination? Shall I fall down to the  
 Stock of a Tree? Is. xlv. 18, 19. Again,  
 in Chap. xlv. Ver. 8. Remember this, and  
 shew yourselves Men: bring it again to  
 mind, Oh ye Transgressors. Thus also in  
 Jer. iv. 22. My People is foolish, they  
 have not known me, they are sottish Chil-  
 dren, and they have no Understanding; they  
 are wise to do evil, but to do good they  
 have no Knowledge. To the same Purpose  
 is that in Chap. viii. Ver. 7. Yea the Stork  
 in the Heavens knoweth her appointed  
 Times, and the Turtle, and the Crane,  
 and the Swallow, observe the Time of their  
 coming, but my People know not the Judg-  
 ment of the Lord. Like that in Is. i. 3.  
 The Ox knoweth his Owner, and the Ass  
 his Master's Crib: But Israel doth not  
 know, my People doth not consider. And in  
 Chap. xiv. Ver. 22. the Prophet thus addres-  
 ses himself to the common Sense and Reason  
 of Mankind, Are there any among the Va-  
 nities of the Gentiles that can cause Rain?



SER. M. VII. *Or can the Heavens give Showers? Art not thou he, O Lord our God? Therefore we will wait upon thee, for thou hast made all these things.*

'TIS the Psalmist's Advice in *Psal. xxxii. 9. That we should not be as the Horse and the Mule which have no Understanding.* That we should not run inconsiderately upon any thing; but as we have Reason and Understanding, whereby we are distinguish'd from other Creatures, so we should make use of these Faculties in the Government and Direction of our Lives and Actions.

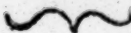
AGAIN in *Psal. xiv. 4. Have all the Workers of Iniquity no Knowledge?*

FROM all which Passages, and many more which might be added, 'tis evident, that the Knowledge of the true God, and the Practice of true Religion, depend upon Mens exercising their own Reason and Judgment upon these Matters, and that 'tis for want of this, that they fall into Idolatry and Wickedness.

IF we proceed to consider the New Testament, we shall find as great Strefs laid upon the Use of our own Reason and Understanding, and as frequent Appeals to it.

IN *Mat. viii. 11.* our Saviour commends S E R M.  
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the *Centurion's* Faith, because it proceeded upon the Principles of right Reason. When his Servant was sick, he did not desire our Saviour to come down to his House, but to *speake the Word only, and his Servant should be healed.* For (says he, at *Ver. 9.*) *I am a Man under Authority, having Soldiers under me; and I say to this Man, go, and he goeth; and to another, come, and he cometh; and to my Servant, do this, and he doth it.* From whence he argued, that if he who himself was under the Authority of others, could yet command those who were under him, much more could our Saviour, who had no Superior upon Earth do this, and have any thing executed at his Command.

IN the Parable of the Sower, *Mat. xiii. 19, 23.* Our Saviour joins hearing and understanding the Word together, and makes the one altogether unprofitable without the other. But we can understand nothing but by the Help of our Reason. If we are not to make use of this, whatever Discourse is directed to us, is spoken into the Air, and leaves no Impression upon us. When any one

SERM. VII.  one heareth the Word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked One, and catcheth away that which was sown in his Heart. *But he that receiveth Seed into the Ground, is he that beareth the Word, and understandeth it, which also beareth Fruit, and bringeth forth some an Hundred Fold, some Sixty, some Thirty.*

IN Chap. xvi. Ver. 3. of the same Gospel, our Saviour reproves the *Pharisees* and *Saducees*, for their Blindness in not discerning the Time of the *Messiah's* coming. *Oh ye Hypocrites, ye can discern the Face of the Sky; but can ye not discern the Signs of the Times?* Which plainly supposes, that they were to use their own Reason, and that thereby they might as certainly know that to be the Time of the *Messiah's* coming, from what was predicted concerning it, as they might discern the Approach of the different Seasons of the Year, from the usual Signs that went before them.

WHEN our Saviour's Disciples mistook the Meaning of that Caution which he gave them, *Mark viii. 15. Take heed, beware*



of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the S E R M. VII.  
 leaven of Herod. Which Caution they interpreted of their having no Bread: Our Saviour reproves them for reasoning no better, since they ought to have inferr'd from what he had so lately done in that Way, that he was able still to supply them after a miraculous Manner. *Perceive ye not yet, says our Saviour, neither understand? How is it that ye do not understand?*

THAT Objection which the *Saducees* made against the Resurrection, and wherewith they thought to puzzle our Saviour, was grounded upon their Ignorance of the Scriptures. *Ye do err, says our Saviour, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the Power of God.* Mat. xxii. 29. Which supposes, that they might have understood things better, if they had read the Scriptures with Attention, and us'd their Reason in discovering what was contain'd in them. 'Tis our Saviour's Advice to the unbelieving *Jews*, that they should *search the Scriptures, for in them, says he, ye think ye have eternal Life. and they are they which testify of me,* John v. 39. But this Advice had been to no purpose, if they were not to have made

S E R M. made any use of their own Reason in find-  
 VII. ing what they search'd for, or were un-  
 able to find it by all the Means they could  
 use

IN *Acts. iv. 19.* *Peter and John* appeal to the Judgment of their Adversaries, and *said unto them, whether it be right in the Sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.*

'TIS a noble Commendation which *St. Paul* gives of the *Bereans*, for *searching the Scriptures, i. e. the Writings of the Old Testament*, which they had already receiv'd upon unquestionable Authority, whether those things which even he himself, who was certainly inspired, were so as he had represented them, *Acts. xvii. 11.*

IN *Rom. x. 17.* the Apostle tells us, that *Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.* But this Hearing must be such as our Saviour mentions in the Place before cited: It must be join'd with Understanding, without which there can be no Believing. In *Chap. xii. Ver. 1.* of this Epistle, that Religion which we are now to practice, is called *our reasonable Service*: Because every thing which it enjoins us, ap-  
 proves

proves itself in the highest Manner to our Reason; but this supposes that we are to exercise our Reason about it, that our Reason is to accompany all our Acts of Religion, without which, however reasonable it may be in itself, it will not be so to us, nor can it be call'd *our reasonable Service*.

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IN 1 Cor. x. 15. the Apostle appeals to the common Sense and Reason of Mankind for the Truth of what he said. *I speak as to wise Men, judge ye what I say.*

IN Chap. xiv. of this Epistle, he bids us not to be in Understanding Children, who are apt to be taken with the Novelty and Strangeness of Things. In Temper and Disposition he bids us to be as Children void of Malice, but in Matters of Understanding to be perfect Men, and to Use our own Understandings. *Brethren, be not Children in Understanding: Howbeit, in Malice be ye Children, but in Understanding be Men.*

AND at Ver. 29. after he had given them several Directions for the decent, orderly, and profitable Exercise of their Gifts in their Assemblies, he adds this among the rest. *Let the Prophets speak two or three, and let*



SERM. VII. *let the other judge, i. e. examine and discuss the Matter.*

IN 2 Cor. xiii. 5. the Apostle exhorts them to try and examine their Religion, whether that Doctrine which he had deliver'd to them was the true Faith of Christ; *Examine yourselves whether ye be in the Faith, prove your own selves.*

IN Eph. v. 6. we are caution'd against being *deceiv'd*, or impos'd upon with *vain Words*, and false Reasonings: But it is by the Help of our Reason and Understanding that we discern and prevent such Impositions; and therefore 'tis added at Ver. 17. *Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the Will of the Lord is.*

ST. Paul in 2 Tim. iii. foretelling a great Apostacy from the Faith, and describing the Apostates, among other Characters which he gives them, he tells us, that they are *Men of corrupt Minds, reprobate concerning the Faith*; Ver. 9. or, as the Word is render'd in the Margin, *Men of no Judgment*. Their Apostacy is, in part, ascrib'd to their want of Judgment; to their not using their Reason at all, or not using it aright. St. Peter in *Epist. 1. Chap. ii. Ver. 2.* exhorts us as

*new born Babes, to desire the sincere Milk* S E R M. VII.  
*of the Word, that we may grow thereby.*

In the Original it is, τὸ λογικὸν ἀδολον γάλα, *lacr rationabile sincerum*, plainly intimating, that the Word was to be apprehended and understood by our Reason, and that by studying and being conversant in it, we should increase and grow in Knowledge and Wisdom. In *Chap. iii. Ver. 15.* of this Epistle, we are commanded, *to be ready always to give an Answer to every Man that asketh us a Reason of the Hope that is in us; i. e.* That we should be able to give a satisfactory Account of our Religion to every one that demands it of us: Why, for instance, we are Christians rather than of any other Persuasion. And this evidently supposes both that there is a Reason for our Religion, and that every Man should study this Point so far, as to be able to assign a good Reason why he is of this or that Religion.

IN many other Cases which concern only ourselves, and our own private Affairs, no Man has a Right to demand of us a Reason of our Actions, nor are we oblig'd to give him any. But Religion being a Matter of such publick and universal Concern, and it being

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being every Man's Duty to set forward the Salvation of his Neighbour; the Apostle seems to intimate, that here every Man has a Right to demand a Reason of our Conduct; and that we are oblig'd to give one, which we cannot do, unless we understand the Grounds and Reasons of our Faith. 'Tis impossible for a Man who himself has no Reason for his Religion, to give another any Reason for it. We must first understand the Reason of our Religion, before we can explain it to others. St *John* in 1 *Epist.* iv. warns us against a rash implicit Belief. He bids us *not to believe every Spirit*, but to make use of our own Understanding, and all other Helps which God has afforded us: *Try the Spirits whether they are of God.* *Because*, says he, *many false Prophets are gone out into the World.*

HE does not reason as the Freethinkers do, that because there are many false Prophets, many false Pretenders to Inspiration, that therefore there are no true Prophets, none that are really inspir'd and sent by God, but because there are so many false Prophets gone out into the World, we must use a great deal of Caution that we be not imposed

upon



upon by every crafty and confident Preted-  
 er. We must try the Spirits, whether they  
 are of God, which plainly supposes both  
 that there are some from God, and that  
 there are Ways of knowing which are so;  
 otherwise, it would be in vain to make any  
 such Tryal, and much better to reject them  
 all without any Distinction.

AND thus I have consider'd and endea-  
 vour'd to answer all the material Objections  
 against this Liberty of private Judgment in  
 religious Matters, and have farther examin'd  
 how this Matter stands in Scripture, and  
 what can be alledg'd either for, or against  
 this Use of Reason out of the Word of  
 God.

THAT Reason is a proper Judge in all  
 Doubts and Disputes about religious Mat-  
 ters, is evident from this plain and short Ar-  
 gument. *viz.* That must be allow'd to be  
 a proper Judge of Controversies of Faith, by  
 whose Sagacity and Judgment alone we un-  
 derstand the Meaning not only of all human  
 Compositions, but of the Scriptures too, and  
 the reveal'd Will of God contain'd in those  
 inspir'd Writings; by whose Help and As-  
 sistance it is that we discern the Authority

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of that Book; distinguish between Truth and Falshood; remove any Doubts and Scruples which arise; and determine those Controversies which are undetermin'd; upon which all useful Enquiries proceed, and by which they are regulated; to which every one who disputes endeavours to conform his Arguments, and whose Judgment none can oppose, or refuse to stand by, without a manifest Contradiction. Certainly, the Province of Judging, does of right belong to such an one as this: At least the Judgment of such an one is sufficient for the Security of every honest and sincere Mind.

Now if we take a View of right Reason, we shall find in it all these Qualifications. For 'tis by the Faculty of Reason, by the Sagacity and Judgment which that is possess'd of, that we understand one another's Meaning, discern the Sense of Scripture as well as of other Books. This is the Privilege of Men above Beasts. 'Tis only by Reason, and the Effects of it, that we are distinguish'd from them, and set above them. 'Tis this Faculty alone that enables us to comprehend the Sense and Meaning of those things

things which are propos'd to us, and to judge of their Truth or Falshood. S E R M.  
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IF it be said, that tho' Reason be a proper Judge in natural Matters, 'tis altogether unable to judge of divine Things: I answer, that divine Things cannot be oppos'd to Reason, but to natural Things, and that only in a Degree of Comparifon, as greater things are oppos'd to smaller; in which Sense perhaps that of our Saviour to *Nicodemus* may be understood, *John* iii. 12. *If I have told you of earthly things, and ye believe not; how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?* Reason is not to be confin'd to natural Things, as if we wanted some other Faculty whereby to comprehend and judge of divine Matters. The same Senses, the same Eyes and Ears, are an Inlet to divine as well as natural Things; they are not so determin'd to natural Things as to be incapable of divine Matters, and to make it necessary to have other Eyes and Ears to read and hear the Scriptures, than what we use in other Books. In like manner, the same Reason and Understanding, which we make Use of in comprehending and judging of human Writings, and the Truths which



S E R M. are there convey'd to us, are sufficient to enable us to comprehend the Sense of inspir'd Writings, and those Truths which are there reveal'd to us by God. If this will not do, there is no understanding these Things at all, since we have no other Faculty or Instrument to employ about them, but that which we use in other Matters.

IF it be farther said, that there are other Helps besides Reason, which will enable us to understand divine Matters, such for instance as the Scripture, Faith, the Church, the Spirit of God; and therefore Reason itself is not a proper Judge in this Case: I answer, that besides what has been already observ'd, that by making Reason a Judge in this Case, we do not exclude the Use of other Helps: These which were just now mention'd, are all of them such as not only suppose but require the Use of Reason.

THE Scripture itself cannot be said to understand or judge of any thing, but must be understood and its Sense and Meaning judg'd of by Reason.

'Tis not an Act of Faith barely to apprehend or know any one's Meaning; since we may do this when we think the things spoken

ken to be utterly false: But Faith follows S E R M.  
the Perception of the Agreement of our Ide- VII.  
as, and is not the Instrument of Knowledge,  
but such an Assent as supposes Knowledge,  
and includes the Use of our Reason.

As to the Church's being a Judge of  
Truth and Falshood, it is no other Way a  
Judge, but by the Help of sound Reason,  
which the Members of it are endu'd with,  
and whatever the Church shall thus deter-  
mine, cannot be understood but by the Use  
of the same Reason which made those De-  
terminations.

As to what concerns the Spirit of God,  
in the first Place, 'tis by no means to be  
granted, that we can understand nothing of  
divine Matters without the particular Assist-  
ance of the Spirit; and then 'tis to be re-  
member'd that the Illumination of the Spirit  
does not contradict or supersede the Use of  
Reason.

If we could understand nothing in divine  
Matters without the peculiar Help of the  
Spirit; Why do we dispute with those who  
differ from us in Religion? Or why do we  
propose the Reading of the Scriptures for  
their Conviction? This would be altogether

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in vain, if they could understand nothing without the Spirit: And if they have the Spirit, we grant them to be in the Right, which is inconsistent with the Difference between us. Or else we must own that Men are capable in some measure of understanding divine Matters without the Help of the Spirit. And this does not wholly exclude all Assistance of the Spirit: For it must be confess'd, that there are many things in Scripture which cannot be perfectly understood without the particular Gift of the Spirit; but these are such as they who do not thoroughly understand them, may both believe the Gospel, and attain the End of their Faith, even the Salvation of their Souls.

HENCE we read in Scripture, that the Spirit is given only to them who believe: Not that they may first understand something in order to believe; for that is a Contradiction, since they believe already, which they could not do without Understanding: But the Spirit is given them that they may understand more for the Confirmation of their own Faith, and the Information of others.

AND



AND even this Illustration of the Spirit <sup>S E R M.</sup>  
does not exclude or contradict, but suppose <sup>VII</sup>  
and require the Use of Reason: It does not  
suppress or destroy, but exalt and improve  
our natural Faculties, and make those things  
clear and intelligible, which would other-  
wise be obscure; and perhaps, not at all to  
be understood. And therefore we are con-  
stantly exhorted and call'd upon to exert our  
rational Faculties, and employ our own Un-  
derstandings even when we are promis'd the  
Assistance of God's Holy Spirit.

THUS far therefore, we meet with no-  
thing which should make us think that Rea-  
son is not capable of judging in divine as  
well as natural Things, and cannot compre-  
hend the Meaning of the Scriptures as it does  
that of other Writings.

To this it may be objected, that the Scrip-  
tures contain some things which are contrary  
to Reason, and which therefore must be as-  
sented to barely upon the Testimony of God:  
Since if we were to consult our Reason a-  
bout them, we could never receive any Sa-  
tisfaction that they were true, but should be  
oblig'd to reject them as false. But to this I  
answer, that nothing can be Matter of di-  
vine

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vine Revelation, which is evidently contrary to Reason, since Reason itself is nothing else but natural Revelation, which God cannot contradict without contradicting himself; and we cannot have greater Evidence of the Truth and Meaning of any Revelation, than we have of the Falseness of that which plainly contradicts our Reason.

BUT this is far from being the Case of any thing contain'd in Scripture, as will quickly appear, if we examine those Particulars which are said to be contrary to Reason. Of this Sort are usually reckon'd the Miracles recorded in Scripture.

BUT these are not contrary to Reason, if we reason from such Principles as are proper in such Cases, which cannot be natural Principles, because the Effects are suppos'd to be supernatural. And therefore, tho' Reason should conclude from natural Principles, that 'tis naturally impossible for a Virgin to bring forth; for Water to be turn'd into Wine; for Iron to swim, and the like: Yet this would not weaken the Authority of Scripture, or overthrow the Truth of those Relations; since these things are not said to be done by a natural, but by a supernatural Power.

Power. And tho' there was a Contradiction in these things (as there is none) yet this Contradiction would not be against Reason, but rather against natural Principles, and the settled steady Laws of Nature; which things are widely distant from Reason.

INDEED, should Reason conclude these things to be impossible, not only in a natural, but in any other Sense, and that they exceeded even a divine Power: Reason would then contradict Scripture. But this is not a Conclusion of sound Reason, which would rather argue that from a superior Cause might be expected superior Effects, and that greater things could be done than Men can do by Beings of greater Power than Men. So that none of the Miracles recorded in Scripture are contrary to Reason, but only to the common and ordinary Laws of Nature, and the usual Phenomena and Appearances of Things.

THE same Consideration will clear all the Prophecies and Predictions contain'd in Scripture, from any Contradiction to Reason. These may justly be esteem'd Miracles, as they are in themselves wonderful and surprising, and what we do not usually meet with



S E R M. with. But tho' these things are plainly be-  
 VII. yond all human Foresight and Sagacity, and  
 in that Sense contrary to Reason: It does not  
 therefore follow that other Beings cannot  
 foretel future Events, at least that such E-  
 vents are not within the Reach of the divine  
 Prescience, and that God does not know  
 whatever will be, before it is; and cannot in  
 any Instances which he pleases, communicate  
 his Knowledge to others.

T H E like may be said of any other Par-  
 ticular which is charg'd with being contrary  
 to Reason; if it be consider'd as coming from  
 God, and we judge of it by divine and not  
 by human Measures, it will not be contrary;  
 but highly agreeable to Reason.

B U T tho' divine Matters are not contrary  
 to Reason, yet it may be said, that many of  
 them are confessedly above Reason, and upon  
 that account not to be submitted to the  
 Judgment of Reason. To this I answer,  
 that if by being above Reason, no more is  
 meant than that these are such things as we  
 could not have known without a previous  
 Revelation; that is, without being taught  
 them by one who knew them: In this Sense  
 not only divine, but human or natural Things  
 may

may be said to be above Reason, since bare S E R M.  
Reason unassisted with Experience and Ob- VII.  
servation, and destitute of the Knowledge  
of the common Principles of Nature, or such  
as belong to particular Things, could never  
have made a Discovery of these. If we sup-  
pose a Person to have been all his Life Time  
debarr'd from the common and ordinary  
Means of Knowledge, and never to have  
had any Instruction or Education, he will  
be ignorant of many of those which are call'd  
natural Things, not because they are above  
his Reason, but because he was never taught  
any of those Principles upon which the  
Knowledge of them depends, nor ever had  
any Foundation laid whereon to build, and  
exercise his Reason about them. And as it  
would be improper to say that these things  
are above Reason, because we cannot know  
them without being taught, so it is to call  
divine Things above Reason, because we  
could not have known them if they had not  
been reveal'd to us.

BUT farther, it is not absolutely true that  
we could know nothing of divine Matters  
if they had not been reveal'd to us. All  
those Points which concern natural Religion,  
which

S E R M. which are both many in Number, and of  
VII. great Moment, may be reduc'd from philosophical Principles, and the Consideration of natural and human Things: Such as the Being and Attributes of God, the Difference and Distinction between moral Good and Evil, the several Virtues and Vices founded upon this Distinction, the Duties belonging to each particular Station, and the like. And as to such things as could not have been known if they had not been reveal'd to us, such as the Redemption of the World by Jesus Christ, the Resurrection of the Body, and eternal Life, with many others of the same Kind: They may rather be said to be above Nature and Philosophy, than above Reason. But be that as it will, it does not follow from hence, that Reason is not a competent Judge even in such divine things as These: For tho' Reason could be no Judge in these Points without the Help of Scripture, it is sufficient for our Purpose, if Reason when 'tis assisted by Revelation, inform'd and enlighten'd by Scripture, be able to pass a Judgment upon these things; for this is all that we contend for. And therefore we bring Reason to the Scripture,



ture, as a Rule or Principle by which it should judge of divine Matters. S E R M.  
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IF it be farther urg'd, that Reason even when assisted by Revelation, cannot comprehend divine Things; I answer, that it cannot indeed attain to a compleat and perfect Knowledge of them: This is not to be had in this Life, where we see through a Glass darkly, and know but in Part. In this Sense natural Things are above Reason, since there are none of these which we are thoroughly and perfectly acquainted with. But our Reason, with the Assistance of Scripture, is able to arrive at so much Knowledge of divine Matters, as is sufficient to secure our own Salvation, and to promote that of others.

THUS I have fully consider'd all the Objections which are made against the Use of Reason in Religion, and have shown that there is no Occasion to discard our Reason, since there is no Inconsistency or Contradiction between that and Faith.

THERE are indeed two Cases wherein Reason must always submit to Faith. First, when such things are reveal'd to us as are beyond the Reach of Reason, and which the Mind

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Mind of Man by its natural Faculties could never have discover'd. This is, strictly speaking, pure Matter of Faith: And if it be certain that there is such a Revelation, and the Sense of it is clear and plain, it ought to be no Objection against the Belief of it, that it is what we could never have known by the bare Use of Reason, or should ever have thought of, if it had not been reveal'd to us.

*Secondly*, WHERE the Matter is not so far above our Reach, but the Mind may arrive at a probable Determination of it, but such a Probability as does not exclude a Possibility of the contrary's being true, there Revelation ought to take place, and we must believe whatever is so reveal'd, however contrary it may be to any Appearance or Probability of Truth: Since nothing less than the absolute Certainty of the Falseness of any Proposition should make us reject it, if it comes attested with Revelation. Whatever is not certainly false may be true, and if God has reveal'd it, it is certainly true, and ought to be believ'd as coming from the eternal Fountain of Truth. If the thing be false, it can never be Matter

of divine Revelation, and ought to be re-  
jected as a Fraud and Imposture.

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IN these two Cases, Reason must always submit to Faith, as that which is of superior, and indeed sole Authority in the present Dispute. In all other Cases whatever, Reason is to be hearken'd to as the proper Judge, and when we use it in Conjunction with those other Helps I have mention'd, and govern it by those Rules I have laid down, it will not fail of leading us into all necessary Truth: By the Assistance of this we shall be enabled to discharge the Duty in the Text, to *prove all things, and hold fast that which is good.*







## SERMON VIII

The Mischiefs and Dangers  
which Men expose them-  
selves to, by indulging that  
Humour which they falsely  
call Freethinking.



I THESS. V. 21.

*Prove all things, hold fast that which  
is good.*

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N the foregoing Discourses upon  
these Words, I have enquir'd  
what the Apostle here means  
by proving all Things, and have  
stated the true Notion of that private Judg-  
ment or Freedom of Thought, which every  
Man

Man ought to exercise in religious Matters, S E R M.  
VIII. and have shewn wherein it consists. And this I did by laying down some brief Rules and Directions necessary to be observ'd in this Matter.

I have consider'd what that Freethinking is which is falsely so call'd, and which some have lately taken up, and have shew'd how much it differs from that in the Text, as it transgresses those Rules which are necessary to be observ'd.

I have prov'd, that the Exercise of private Judgment, or Freethinking properly so call'd, is not only every Man's just Right, and what he cannot be depriv'd of by any Authority whatever, but that 'tis every Man's Duty, and what we are all indispensably oblig'd to. And that we might perform our Duty in this Particular as we ought, I have shew'd what Cautions are necessary to be observ'd in this Use of our private Reason and Judgment in religious Matters. To encourage us to the Practice of this Duty, I have shew'd that true Religion is not an Enemy to right Reasoning, or true Freethinking, and that the more freely and impartially we examine the Christian Religion in particular, the more  
reasonable

**S E E M.** reasonable and credible it will appear to be.  
**VIII.** That this is the main Foundation and Support of Religion, and that there can be no true Religion without it.

I have consider'd at large all the Objections which are rais'd against this Doctrine, and have shewn, that 'tis so far from being any Prejudice to the Cause of Religion, that the greatest Mischief which has been done to Religion, has been owing to the Neglect of Mens exercising their own Reason and Judgment about it.

HAVING gone thus far with the Scheme I laid down at first, I come now to close it, with shewing as briefly as I can, what I propos'd in the last Place, and that is,

THE Mischiefs and Dangers arising from Freethinking falsly so call'd.

As the right Use of our Reason, and Proceeding in all our Enquiries, with Sobriety and Soundness of Judgment, is of great Benefit to true Religion, and the main Support of it; since there is nothing more rational than true Religion, and which appears with so much Advantage when it is try'd and examin'd: So there is nothing



which does greater Disservice to it, than a S E R M.  
superficial and partial Examination of it, and VIII.  
proceeding in our Searches and Enquiries a-  
bout it, without observing the Rules of  
right Reasoning, or good Manners.

THE best Things always suffer most by  
being ill treated, as the least Breath will  
tully the clearest Glass, and every Spot is  
visible upon a clean Garment: So it fares  
with Religion, which, tho' capable of the  
best Defence, and able to undergo the severest  
Tryal; yet suffers most of all by a bad De-  
fence, and appears with the greatest Disad-  
vantage, when Men examine it by false Rules  
and Measures. And as it is a Matter of the  
most serious Concern, and the greatest Im-  
portance, and contains such weighty and sa-  
cred Truths; so 'tis most capable of being  
expos'd and ridicul'd, and represented in a  
slovenly Dress. And therefore, if in our  
Treatment of it, and Enquiries about it,  
we neglect those Rules which were laid  
down in my first Discourse, and have no  
Regard either to the Subject we are upon,  
or our Manner of handling it, we shall do  
great Prejudice both to ourselves, and the  
Cause we are engag'd in.

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IF Men come to the Study of Religion without a sincere Love of Truth, nay with apparent Prejudices against the Truth, especially Truths of a religious Nature, the strongest Arguments will lose their Force, and nothing which is urg'd, tho' never so clear and satisfactory, will be sufficient to convince them. In them is fulfilled, as our Saviour observes, the Prophecy of *Isaiah*, which saith, *By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand: And seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this People's Heart is waxed gross, and their Ears are dull of hearing, and their Eyes have they clos'd; lest at any Time they should see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and should understand with their Hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them.* Mat. xiii. 14, 15.

INSTEAD of hearkening to sound Reason and sober Sense, and giving every Argument it's due Weight, they will set themselves to spie out Flaws, and pick Holes, and raise Doubts and Difficulties in the plainest and most obvious Truths. And Men may indulge this Humour so long 'till they have impair'd, and almost lost the Faculty of Reasoning.

oning, and are fitted to swallow the gross-  
st Absurdities, and believe any Contradic-  
tion, provided it be against the Principles of  
Religion. Any weak Objection, or frivolous  
Scruple shall stagger them, and every Thing  
that has but the Face, shall with them have  
the Force of an Argument, and pass for De-  
monstration, if it be advanc'd against the  
known Truths of Religion; nay, even an  
impious Quibble, or prophane Jest, upon any  
thing that is serious and sacred, shall out-  
weigh the strongest Reasons, and best Argu-  
ments which are brought against them.

THUS dangerous is it to a Man's self, to  
indulge this Humour; and it does great Dis-  
service to Religion, which, tho' it can ne-  
ver be hurt by sober Argument, and sound  
Reasoning, may however be expos'd and ren-  
der'd contemptible by ludicrous Representa-  
tions, prophane Scoffs and Jests, and such  
like Buffoonery. These Things are apt to  
make bad Impressions upon weak Minds, and  
are too grateful to the vicious and corrupt  
Palates of Men; and therefore thus to treat  
Religion in this ludicrous sporting Manner,  
and to use this Familiarity with such serious  
Things, will lessen that Veneration which



S E R M. we ought to have for them, and at last, and  
 VIII. by Degrees, bring them into Contempt.  
 And this is a Mischief which they must  
 answer for, who allow themselves in this  
 Practice.

AGAIN, tho' the Performance of the  
 Duty in the Text, of *proving all things*,  
*i. e.* of thoroughly examining the Grounds  
 and Principles of Religion, be undoubtedly  
 the best Way to establish ourselves in the  
 true Faith; yet indulging a sceptical Hu-  
 mor, an itch of Disputing, and a Custom  
 of calling every Thing into Question, can  
 never bring us to any fix'd, or settled Opinion  
 or Belief, but only tends to make us doubt  
 of and disbelieve every Thing, and at last  
 to throw us into downright Atheism and  
 Infidelity. This is what this disputatious  
 sceptical Humor frequently ends in. As  
 Men may report a Lye so often, 'till they  
 come at last to believe it themselves; so they  
 may accustom themselves so long to dispute,  
 and call in question the plainest Truths, 'till  
 they come at last to disbelieve them in good  
 earnest.

THE same ill Effect has the requiring  
 greater Evidence for the Truths of Religion,  
 than

than is either reasonable in itself, or the Nature of the Thing will admit: This tends to make Men doubt of and disbelieve what is sufficiently attested; and asking for more Evidence than they ought, hinders them from submitting to what they should. This too represents Religion as weak, and standing upon a precarious Foundation, when in Truth it is as well establish'd as in the Nature of the Thing it ought to be, or can be. I have already shew'd, that in those Things which are common to Religion with other Matters, Religion stands upon as good a Bottom, if not better, than any of them. This is the Case of the History of the Gospel, and the Authentickness of those Books, which convey this History to us, upon the Truth of which, the Truth of Christianity depends. In this Respect Religion is as firmly establish'd, as any Thing else.

AND therefore, to represent Religion as precarious and uncertain, which they do who require other, or higher Evidence for the Truth of it, than is sufficient, is very injurious to it, as it hinders Men from believing and embracing it. 'Tis to the full as bad to make Men reject the Truth, as to persuade

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persuade them to believe a Lye, and much worse in the present Case, because ordinarily speaking, Men will never suffer by believing Religion, if it should prove false; but they will be infinite Loosers by rejecting it, if it proves true; and they who persuade them to this, deprive them of infinitely more than they can ever make up, by any thing else they can substitute in it's Room.

BUT to convince the Enemies of Religion of their unreasonable Demands, in requiring more Evidence for the Truth of Religion than God has given us, and to prevent the Mischief which such Demands may do, by insinuating that Religion is not sufficiently attested, it is to be observ'd, that they greatly mistake the Nature of Religion, who require such Proofs of it, as amount to a Demonstration, and cannot be deny'd.

FOR Religion, more especially the Christian Religion, and those Truths which the New Testament contains, were design'd as a Criterion or Touch-stone, to try Mens Ingenuity, Probity, and Sincerity: And therefore, if the Writings of that Book carry'd such Evidence along with them, as could not possibly be gainsay'd, or contradicted;  
there



there is no Body who would not readily profess the Religion contain'd in that Book, and not only so, but be a Christian indeed, and sincerely obey the Precepts of our Saviour; because the Reward which is there propos'd to us, is so exceeding great and desirable, that there is no Body who would not do more, and greater Things, for obtaining that Reward, than our Saviour has requir'd, if he was absolutely certain of obtaining it, as he would be, if he knew all those Things to be absolutely true and certain, which are contain'd in the New Testament. But at this Rate there would be no Difference, or Distinction, made between good and bad Men, nor any Ground for doing well or ill, and consequently no Foundation for Rewards or Punishments. Virtue and Vice would lose their Natures, upon such a forcible Motive as this, or rather the latter would unavoidably be excluded, and the former have nothing in it commendable or praise-worthy.

WHEREAS, the Reward being propos'd with any Degree of Evidence that comes short of absolute Certainty, hereby good and bad Men will easily be known and distinguished

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tinguish'd from each other. For he that is good, he that is well dispos'd and inclin'd to such virtuous Deeds as our Saviour has recommended, will easily believe those Things which are spoken of the great Reward that is promis'd to those who do them, tho' he does not evidently see it, nor is absolutely certain of it. If there be a good Appearance of the Reallity and Greatness of this Reward, any Probability or well-grounded Hope of his obtaining it; such a Belief as this, will put him upon exerting his utmost Strength and Power to obtain this Reward, by performing the Conditions to which it is annex'd.

BUT he that is wicked and ill dispos'd, who takes no Delight in virtuous and commendable Actions, nor has any Relish or Regard for such Things as our Saviour has recommended; when he hears any Thing of the Reward which is promis'd to those who do such Things, he gives but little Attention to it, and the greater it is, the less does he believe it. And if upon Account of the frequent Mention which is made of it, and the great Things which are reported about it, he comes to have any Opinion or Belief  
of

of it, this is so weak, as not to induce him S E R M. VIII.  
to forsake his ill Ways, and relinquish the  
Pleasures, Riches, and Honours, which he  
either found, or expected from his former  
Course of Life.

AND therefore God, in great Wisdom,  
has not thought fit to make the Reward of  
Immortality and eternal Life, which he has  
promis'd to all who sincerely embrace the  
Gospel, so manifest and evident, as not to ad-  
mit of any manner of Doubt or Uncertainty,  
except only to those who were to bring over  
others to a Belief of it, nor, by Consequence,  
the Books of the New Testament, which  
contain the fullest Account of this Reward,  
so perfectly free from all Manner of Excep-  
tion, as not to be capable in any Respect,  
of being disputed, and call'd in Question.

HE has thought it sufficient, and abun-  
dantly sufficient it is, that these Books, and  
any other Evidences there are of this Re-  
ward, should be such, as Men not only  
might, but ought to believe, such as are  
Satisfactory to every one that is honest and  
sincere, or dispos'd to be so; but not so to  
those who are obstinate and perverse, who  
hate Conviction and Reformation, and wil-  
fully



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fully oppose the Truth: That by this Means there being a Manifestation of Mens different Tempers, God's Justice might be clear'd, in punishing the one, and his Mercy glorified, in rewarding the other.

So that to refuse our Assent to Religion, or withhold our Obedience from it, 'till we have Demonstration of it's Truth; to suspect that Things may possibly be otherwise, than they are represented; to raise Difficulties and Objections, which at the Bottom have nothing in them, and to stand out 'till every Thing is clear and plain as the Evidence of Sense; is to mistake and destroy the Nature of Faith, which tho' it should never degenerate into Credulity, yet it ought always to be distinguish'd from Obstinacy, by submitting to sufficient Evidence, which in religious Truths, is short of the Evidence of Sense, of absolute Certainty, and undeniable Demonstration. To swallow Absurdities, to believe Impossibilities and Contradictions, is no Part of Faith, but an Instance of great Folly and Weakness. Faith consists in submitting to reasonable Evidence, to such Evidence as the Things we believe are capable of, and we may justly expect: And therefore

fore to oppose Religion, and dissuade Men from embracing it, under a Pretence of securing them from Error, 'till they have such Evidence as is inconsistent with the Nature of Religion, is to do the greatest Injury to Religion, and to deprive both ourselves and others of that Blessedness, which our Saviour has pronounc'd upon such as are willing to believe upon competent Evidence, in those Words which he spoke to *Thomas*, concerning the Truth of his Resurrection. *John* xx. 29. *Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believ'd: Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believ'd.* Where our Saviour reproves *Thomas*, because he refus'd to believe, upon any less Evidence than that of Sense; when in the present Case, the Testimony of others, who were credible Persons: And in other Cases, that Evidence which differ'd in Kind, as well as Degree, from the Evidence of Sense, would be sufficient to persuade us to believe.

AGAIN, as this false Freethinking neglects or disdains the Use of proper Helps and Assistances in it's Enquiries about religious Matters, it cannot but be very prejudicial to Religion, which, like other Parts  
of

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of Science, has it's *præcognoscenda*, it's Elements or Rudiments, in which Men must be taught and instructed, and by which they must lay a Foundation for their farther Progress in the Knowledge of Religion. These are what the Apostle means by the first Principles of the Oracles of God; the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ; *Heb. v. 12.* and *vi. 1.* And therefore if we wholly neglect these Principles, or mistake them, and take up with wrong ones; if we lay no Foundation, or a false one, the Superstructure will be answerable, and come to nothing. In this Case, we shall meet with the same Success in our religious Enquiries, as we should in Law or Physick, should we undertake those Professions without ever learning the Principles of either.

THUS, for Instance, since the main Doctrine of the Gospel, and that Redemption which our Saviour wrought for us, is founded upon the Supposition of *Adam's Fall*; 'tis impossible to form a true Notion of the Christian Scheme, and to understand what the Benefits and Privileges are, which our Saviour has purchased for us, without knowing the Damage we sustain'd by *Adam's Fall*,



Fall, and the Foot upon which that left us. S E R M.  
VIII.  
The not understanding this a-right, or wilfully mistaking it, has introduc'd some of the grossest Errors into Christianity, and been the Occasion of many disadvantageous Representations of the Doctrine of the Gospel.

AGAIN, as to the Scriptures themselves, particularly the Books of the New Testament: These cannot be understood, if we neglect those requisite Helps which have been already mention'd; and 'tis to the Neglect of these, that such strange and absurd Doctrines are owing, which Men have pretend'd to gather out of these Books. And in general, it appears from what has been already said, and the Instances I have produc'd, that the chief Objections which have been rais'd against Christianity, are built wholly upon Mistakes and Misrepresentations, and vanish of themselves as soon as we consider Things in a true Light.

These are some of those Mischiefs which arise from Freethinking falsly so call'd, as it consists in a Neglect of the Rules of right Reasoning, to which many more might be added:

S E R M. added: For they are equal to the Benefits  
 VIII. which arise from a right Use of our Reason;  
 and as that will lead us into all necessary  
 Truth, so there is no dangerous Error or  
 fatal Mistake, which the other will not bring  
 upon us.

BUT if we take this false Freethinking as  
 it consists in a direct Design of misrepresent-  
 ing Religion, and misguiding Men, by lead-  
 ing them into Error, or diverting them from  
 the Truth, the Mischief it does is so much  
 the greater, and the Guilt, which thereby  
 we contract, so much the deeper: 'Tis in  
 itself much easier to puzzle and confound  
 Things, than to explain and clear them up;  
 to overthrow what is already establish'd,  
 tho' upon good Grounds, than to advance  
 any Thing better and more certain in it's  
 Room; to propagate Vice and Error, than  
 to bring Men to the Belief and Practice of  
 true Religion: And when Men of Parts and  
 Learning, of Character and Reputation, set  
 themselves upon this, and turn all their Stu-  
 dies to obscure or undermine the Truth, to  
 confound Mens Understandings, by throw-  
 ing every Thing into Disorder and uncer-  
 tainty, and confounding the Boundaries be-  
 tween

tween Truth and Falshood, Knowledge and Ignorance: They are capable of doing incredible Mischief, and tho' 'tis every Man's Duty to be upon his guard, and not suffer himself to be impos'd upon, yet the Errors and Mistakes, the Scepticism and Infidelity, which this Practice may occasion, will be laid to their Charge who indulge themselves in it. The Woe which the Prophet denounces does justly belong to such, and will fall heavily upon them. *Woe unto them that call Evil Good, and Good Evil; that put Darknes for Light, and Light for Darknes; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter; Is. v. 20.*

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THUS we have seen both the Use, and Abuse of Reason in religious Matters, and how highly agreeable to Reason, Religion, especially the Christian Religion is; and with what Advantage it appears, when 'tis fairly examin'd, and according to the Rules of right Reasoning. We have seen what unfair Practices they are forc'd to have Recourse to, who pretend to attack this Scheme, from the Principles of Reason; that the Arguments which they bring against it, are either wilful Mistakes and Misrepresentations,

R

or



SERMON. or palpable Errors and Blunders, and have  
 VIII. nothing at all in them; or if they have any  
 Force, they hold equally strong against any  
 Thing else that can be mention'd as well as  
 Religion. And therefore if we renounce  
 Christianity, we must give up all Certainty  
 of a moral Kind, and fall into universal  
 Scepticism and Infidelity.

FOR if there be less Certainty, less Evi-  
 dence of the Truth of Christianity, than of  
 any other Thing, it arises from the Na-  
 ture of Christianity, the Virtues which it  
 enjoins, and the Rewards which it promises.  
 This Scheme was never design'd to be pro-  
 pos'd to the World with an over-ruling Evi-  
 dence, such as should bear down all Opposi-  
 tion, but with such Evidence, as should  
 leave Room for Men to shew their Probity  
 and Sincerity. and give them an Opportunity  
 of exercising those Virtues, for which there  
 would be no Occasion, and which would be  
 no Virtue upon an absolute Certainty, and  
 undeniable Demonstration of the Truth of  
 Christianity.

AND therefore we should not suffer our-  
 selves to be stagger'd in our Faith, or mov'd  
 from

from our Stedfastness, either by the Confidence or the Cunning of the Enemies of Religion, by their Boldness in disputing against the plainest Truths, or their Subtily in confounding them, and suggesting a Possibility of their being false; which is the utmost that the Advocates for Infidelity and Atheism can pretend to. For we have such Proof and Evidence of the Truth of the Things we believe, as is sufficient to weigh with, and win upon all candid and ingenuous Minds, and much superior to any which they are able to bring against them. If we divest ourselves of all Prejudices, especially those which arise from our Lusts and Passions, our Sins and Vices, and enter upon an impartial Examination of Matters, we shall find that we have abundant Reason to be satisfy'd of the Truth and Excellency of that Religion we profess, and shall have no Cause to fear that we shall be disappointed of our Hope, and fall short of the Promises that are made us, but by falling short of performing the Duties that are enjoin'd us. 'Tis no Disparagement to the Truth of Religion, that it has been weakly defended by

S E R M.  
VIII.

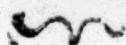
some, and that others, who profess to believe it, are wicked, and do not live agreeably to it. None of these Things affect the Merits of the Cause, nor make against it. 'Tis no Argument that Religion is false, because it has been oppos'd, and argu'd against by Men of Parts and Learning; Or that Christianity in particular, is not a most wise and reasonable Institution, because it has been misrepresented and expos'd by Men of Wit and Pleasure: Since there are so many By-ends which Men may serve, and so many wrong Motives to treat Religion thus, without any Weakness or Uncertainty in the Principles and Foundation of it.

THE Kingdom of Christ was erected in Opposition to the Kingdom of the Devil, and as the one has been promoted by an Order of Men appointed for that End, whose Study and Business it should be, to publish and enforce the Laws and Precepts of the Gospel, and these Laws and Precepts are written, that Men might freely have Recourse to them, and several Books have been publish'd, to explain and defend them: So the Devil has imitated these Proceedings;



Proceedings; He has his wicked Agents S E R M.  
and Factors, Ministers of Impiety and Pro- VIII.  
phaness, whose daily Business it is to in-  
stil and inculcate into the Minds of Men,  
loose and Atheistical Principles, and to pro-  
pagate Wickedness and Infidelity in the  
World. And least this should not be suf-  
ficient, they too have form'd and digested  
their pernicious Notions and Doctrines in-  
to regular Bodies and Systems, and made  
their Creeds and Articles of Unbelief, and  
are daily publishing Books in Defence of  
these, and transmitting down in Writing  
their Tenets, in Opposition both to natu-  
ral and reveal'd Religion, to the Precepts  
of Morality, as well as the Principles of  
Christianity.

BUT none of these Things should move  
us from our Stedfastness in Religion, or  
shake our Belief of it, since these Men  
have an apparent Interest to serve distinct  
from the Truth, and 'tis no Disparagement  
to Religion, but a Commendation of it,  
that 'tis oppos'd by Men of loose Princi-  
ples, and licentious Practices; and since by  
the right Use of our Reason, in Conjunc-  
tion

S E R M.  
VIII.

tion with those other Helps which God has afforded us, we may easily discern the Weakness and Fallacy of those Arguments, which they bring to undermine the Truth of Religion, and the Power of Godliness.

SINCE the Gospel has made its Way and prevail'd in the World, notwithstanding all the Disadvantages it has laid under, and all the Endeavours which have been us'd to obstruct its Progress : This is a good Testimony of its native Worth and Weight, that it is able to bear down all Opposition, and to prevail over all the Prejudices which have been rais'd against it. It was fit that Truth and Error, Wisdom and Folly, should meet together upon the Stage of the World, that it might appear which was the stronger, and would finally overcome. And this has already appear'd, as far as the Combat has been already carry'd, and will always appear upon every new Occasion. Error will never prevail against Truth, nor Vice against Virtue, but Wisdom will be found of them that seek her, will be justified of her Children; and if we be sincere in our Practice of  
the

the Duty in the Text, of proving all S E R M.  
Things, notwithstanding all the Arts and VIII.  
Endeavours of the Enemies of Religion,  
we shall be able to find, and to hold fast  
that which is good.

*F I N I S*







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A  
LIST  
OF THE

Learned Persons who have  
Preached the LECTURE founded by  
the Hon. ROBERT BOYLE, Esq;  
from its Beginning in 1692. to the  
present Year 1726. with an Account  
of their SUBJECTS.

1692.



RICHARD BENTLEY, D. D. now  
Master of *Trinity* College in  
*Cambridge*, and *Margaret* Pro-  
fessor of Divinity there.

The Folly of *Atheism*, and what is now  
call'd *Deism*, with respect to this present  
Life, in Eight Sermons.

Serm.

Serm. I. on *Psal.* xiv. 1. A Confutation of *Atheism* from the Faculties of the Soul.

Serm. II, III, IV, V. on *Acts* xvii. 27. A Confutation of *Atheism* from the Structure and Origin of human Bodies.

Serm. VI, VII, VIII. — From the Origin and Frame of the World ; on *Acts* xiv. 15.

*First printed in 4<sup>o</sup>, now reprinted in 8<sup>o</sup> by Mr. Crownfeild of Cambridge.*

1623.

DR. BENTLEY. but the Sermons were not printed.

1624.

RICHARD KIDDER, D.D. Lord Bishop of *Bath* and *Wells*. Eight Sermons. The greatest Part of which is contain'd in the three first Chapters of the second Part of his *Demonstration of the Messias*: Wherein the Pretences of the *Jews*, for their Unbelief are consider'd.

*First in Octavo, now reprinted in Folio, with the other two Parts of his Demonstration of the Messias, for J. Osborn and T. Longman.*

1695.



1695, & 1696.

JOHN WILLIAMS, D. D. afterwards  
Lord Bishop of *Chichester*. Twelve Sermons  
printed.

Serm. I.—VIII. on *Heb. i. 1, 2.* shewing  
the *Possibility, Expediency, and Necessi-  
ty of Divine Revelation.*—The *Cer-  
tainty* of it.—The *Characters* of it.  
—The *Truth* of the *Holy Scriptures.*  
—The *Divine Authority* of them.—  
The *several Ways of Revelation.* — The  
*Perfection* of the *Evangelical Revela-  
tion.*

Serm. IX. on *Gal. i. 8, 9.* on the same.

Serm. X. on *John v. 39.* Scripture the *Rule  
of Faith.*

Serm. XI. The *Perspicuity* of Scripture, and  
Rules for the *Interpretation* of it; on  
*Acts xvii. 11, 12.*

Serm. XII. The *Unreasonableness* of Infide-  
lity; on *Luke xvi. 31.*

*First printed in 4<sup>o</sup>, now reprinted in 8<sup>o</sup>.  
with other Sermons.*

1697.

1697.

FRANCIS GASTRILL, D. D. afterwards Lord Bishop of *Chester*.

The *Certainty* and *Necessity* of Religion in General, or the first *Grounds* and *Principles* of *human Duty* established ; in eight Sermons on *Heb. xi. 6.*

*Printed in 8° for T. Bennet.*

1698.

JOHN HARRIS, M. A. afterwards D. D. and Rector of *St. Mildred's Breadstreet, London.*

The *Atheistical* Objections against the *Being* of *GOD*, and his *Attributes*, fairly considered, and fully refuted ; in eight Sermons.

Serm. I. *Immorality* and *Pride* the great *Causes* of *Atheism*.

Serm. II. The *Atheists* Objection, that we can have *no Idea* of *God*, refuted.

Serm. III. The *Notion* of a *GOD* neither from *Fear* nor *Policy*. All from *Psf. x. 4.*

Serm.

Serm. IV, V. The *Atheists* Objection against the *immaterial Nature* of G O D, and *incorporeal Substances*. On *John* iv. 24.

Serm. VI. A Refutation of the Objections against the *Attributes* of G O D in general.

Serm. VII. Objections against *moral Good* and *Evil*.

Serm. VIII. Of the atheistical Notion of *Fate* and *absolute Necessity*. On *Fer.* ix. 24.

*Printed in 4<sup>o</sup> for R. Wilkin:*

1699.

SAMUEL BRADFORD, D.D. now Lord Bishop of *Rochester*, and Dean of *Westminster*, and of the Order of the *Bath*.

The *Credibility* of the Christian *Revelation* from its *intrinsick Evidence*; in eight Sermons, with a ninth in Reply to an *Objection*.

Serm. I. The *Qualifications* requisite towards receiving a *Divine Revelation*. On *John* vi. 45.

Serm. II. Apostate Men *fit Objects* of Divine Care and Compassion. On *1 Tim.* i. 15.  
Serm.



Serm. III. The *Nature* of that Salvation which the Gospel offereth, and the *Method* of obtaining it by a *Mediator*.

Serm. IV. The *Excellency* of the Christian Revelation, as it removes the guilty *Fears* of Sinners, and their *Ignorance* of God.

Serm. V. As it teacheth us to *know* our *selves* and our *Duty*.

Serm. VI, VII. As it *proposeth* to us a *perfect Example*.

Serm. VIII. As it promiseth *Assistance* and *compleat Salvation* to Sinners. All on the same Text.

Serm. IX. The *imperfect Promulgation* of the Gospel considered. On *John* iii. 16, 17.

*Printed in 4° for T. Parkhurst.*

1700.

OFFSPRING BLACKALL, D.D. afterwards Lord Bishop of *Exeter*.

The *Sufficiency* of a *standing Revelation* in general, and of the *Scripture Revelation* in particular, both as to the *Matter* of it, and as to the *Proof* of it; and the

*new* Revelations cannot reasonably be desired, and would probably be *unsuccessful*.  
On *Luke* xvi. 29, 30, 31.

First printed in 4°, and afterwards reprinted in 8°, with other Sermons, for W. Kettilby.

1701, 1702.

GEORGE STANHOPE, D.D. now Dean of *Canterbury*:

The *Truth* and *Excellence* of the *Christian* Religion asserted, against *Jews*, *Infidels*, and *Hereticks*, in sixteen Sermons. Wherein is shewn, that the *Evidence* for this Religion is the most *unexceptionable*; that it *establishest* and *perfects* the Law; makes the *clearest* Discoveries of a *future State*, and *accomplishes* the *Prophecies* of the Old Testament. That the *Belief* of its Doctrines is *reasonable*; the *Obedience* required to its Precepts *practicable*. The *Wisdom* of the *Gospel* above any other Religious Institution, and its *divine Authority*, proved from the *successful Propagation* of it. His Texts, 1 *Cor.* i. 21 — 25. *Rom.* iii. 31. 2 *Tim.* i. 10. 2 *Pet.* i. 19. 1 *Cor.* ii. 12.

ii. 12, 13, 14. 1 *John* v. 3. 1 *Cor.* i. 25. the latter Part.

*Printed in 4° for R. Sare.*

1703.

Dr ADAMS, afterwards *Provost* of King's College in *Cambridge*, preached this Year; but his Sermons were not printed.

1704, and 1705.

S. CLARKE, D. D. now Rector of St. James's Church, *Westminster*.

A *Demonstration* of the *Being* and *Attributes* of GOD; more particularly in Answer to Mr. *Hobbs*, *Spinoza*, and their Followers: Wherein the Notion of *Liberty* is stated, and the *Possibility* and *Certainty* of it proved in Opposition to *Necessity* and *Fate*. Being the Substance of eight Sermons preached in the Year 1704.

A Discourse of the unchangeable Obligations of natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation, in eight Sermons, preach'd in the Year 1705.

*Printed in one Volume in 8° for J. Knapton.*

1706



1706.

JOHN HANCOCKE, D. D. Rector of St. Margaret's *Lothbury*, and now Prebendary of *Canterbury*.

Arguments to prove the *Being* of GOD ; with Objections against it answered. Being several Sermons on *Acts* xvii. 23.

*Printed in 8° for B. Aylmer.*

1707.

WILLIAM WHISTON, M. A. then Professor of the *Mathematicks* in the University of *Cambridge*.

The Accomplishment of *Scripture Prophecies*. In eight Sermons on 2 *Pet.* i. 19. With an *Appendix*. To which is subjoin'd, a *Dissertation* to prove that our Saviour ascended into Heaven on the Evening after his Resurrection.

*Printed in 8° for B. Tooke.*

1708.

JOHN TURNER, D. D. Vicar of *Greenwich*, and afterwards Prebendary of *Canterbury*.

The Wisdom of GOD in the *Redemption* of Man, as delivered in Holy Scripture, vindicated from the chief Objections of our modern Infidels. In eight Sermons. In which the true Nature and Necessity of *Atonement* and *Satisfaction* for Sins are at large explained and proved, both from Scripture and Reason.

*Printed in 8<sup>o</sup> for J. Wyat.*

1709.

LILLY BUTLER, D. D. Minister of *Alldermanbury*, afterwards Prebendary of *Canterbury*.

A Discourse proving that the *Faith* and *Practice* of true Christians are no just Matter of *Shame* and *Reproach*. In eight Sermons on *Rom. x. 11.*

*Printed in 8<sup>o</sup> for B. Aylmer.*

1710.

JOSIAH WOODWARD, D.D. then  
Minister of *Poplar*.

The *Divine* Original and incomparable  
*Excellency* of the Christian Religion, as  
founded on the Holy Scriptures, asserted and  
vindicated, in eight Sermons.

Serm. I. The Certainty of God's *Being*,  
and of his *universal* Government, on  
1 *Cor.* i. 21.

Serm. II. The divine *Light*, *Succour*, and  
*Comfort* of the Christian Religion; on  
the same.

Serm. III. The *Divine* Original of the Ho-  
ly Scriptures, on *John* vi. 68, 69.

Serm. IV, and V. on the Divine *Nature* of  
our Lord *Jesus Christ*, on *John* i. 1.

Serm. VI. Causes of the modern Infidelity,  
on *Rom.* i. 28.

Serm. VII. The Reasonableness of the Chri-  
stian's *Hope*, on *Titus* i. 2, 3.

Serm. VIII. The *due Practice* of the Chri-  
stian Religion a good *Refutation* of Inf-  
idels and Scoffers, on 2 *Pet.* iii. 14.

*Printed in 8° for J. Downing.*



1711, 1712.

WILLIAM DERHAM, F.R.S. Rector of *Upminster* in *Essex*, and now Canon of *Windsor*.

A Demonstration of the *Being* and *Attributes* of God from his Works of *Creation*. The Substance of sixteen Sermons, with large Notes and many curious Observations.

*Printed in 8° for W. and J. Innys.*

1713, 1714.

BENJAMIN IBBOT, D. D. Rector of *St. Paul's Shadwell*, and *Preacher-Assistant* at *St. James's Westminster*, and afterwards *Prebendary of Westminster*. Sixteen Sermons from *1 Thess. v. 21.* as may be seen in the foregoing Volume.

*Printed for J. Wyat.*

1715, 1716.

WILLIAM STONESTREET, M. A. Rector of *St. Stephen Walbrook*. His Text was, *1 Cor. xiii. 12. Now we see through a Glass darkly, but then Face to Face.* He dying before the Course was quite finished, the Sermons were not printed.

1717,

1717, 1718.

JOHN LENG, D.D. now Lord Bishop  
of *Norwich*.

*Natural Obligations* to believe the Prin-  
ciples of *Religion*, and *Divine Revelation*,  
in sixteen Sermons.

Serm. I, II, III. on *Heb.* iii. 12.

Serm. IV, V. on *Heb.* xi. 6.

Serm. VI, VII, VIII. on *Rom.* i. 19, 20, 21.

Serm. IX. on *Rom.* xx. 21.

Serm. X, XI, XII. on *Isa.* ii. 3.

Serm. XIII, XIV. on *John* iii. 2.

Serm. XV. on *Heb.* iii. 4.

Serm. XVI. on *Luke* vii. 23.

*Printed in 8<sup>o</sup> for R. Knaplock.*

1719, 1720.

JOHN CLARKE, D.D. now Prebenda-  
ry of *Canterbury*.

An Enquiry into the *Causes* and *Origin*  
of *Evil*, in which the principal Phænomena  
of Nature are explained according to the  
true Principles of Philosophy; more parti-  
cularly

cularly in Answer to Mr. *Bayle*, and other Defenders of the antient *Manichean* Scheme, of two independent Principles ; being the Substance of eight Sermons.

An Enquiry into the *Causes* and *Origin* of *moral Evil* ; in which the present State and Condition of Mankind is considered and explained upon the true Principles of *Morality* and *Revelation* ; and the Objections of the antient and modern Defenders of the *Manichean* Scheme, particularly Mr. *Bayle*, fully answered. The Substance of eight Sermons more.

*Printed in 2 Volumes in 8<sup>o</sup> for J. Knapton.*

1721, 1722.

BRAMPTON GURDON, M. A. Chaplain to the Right Hon. *Thomas* Earl of *Macclesfeild* (then Lord High Chancellor of *Great Britain*) and now Rector of *St. Edmund the King*, and *St. Nicholas Acons*, *London*.

The pretended *Difficulties* in Natural or Revealed Religion no *Excuse* for *Infidelity*. In sixteen Sermons.

Serm;



Serm. I. on 1 *Tim.* iv. 8.

Serm. II, III, IV, V. on 1 *Thess.* v. 21.

Serm. VI, VII, VIII, IX. on *Acts* xvii. 28.

Serm. X. on *Rom.* i. 22.

Serm. XI. on *Isa.* v. 20.

Serm. XII. on *John* xv. 24.

Serm. XIII, XIV. on 1 *Cor.* i. 21.

Serm. XV, XVI. on 2 *Pet.* i. 16.

*Printed in 8° for R. Knaplock.*

1723.

WILLIAM BURSCOUGH, D. D. now  
Lord Bishop of *Limerick* in *Ireland*. Eight  
Sermons, but not printed.

1724, 1725.

THOMAS BURNET, D. D. Rector of  
*Westkington* in *Wiltshire*, and Prebendary of  
*Sarum*.

The Demonstration of *true Religion*, in a  
Chain of Consequences from certain and un-  
deniable *Principles* ; wherein the *Necessity*  
and *Certainty* of *Natural* and *Revealed* Re-  
ligion, with the *Nature* and *Reason* of both,  
are

( 264 )

are proved and explained. And in particular, the *Authority* of the *Christian Revelation* is established, not only from the *Natures* and *Reasons* of Things, but also from the *Relation* it bears to the Scriptures of the *Old Testament*. In sixteen Sermons.

*Printed in 2 Vol. 8<sup>o</sup> for A. Bettesworth.*

1726.

The same Dr. BURNET.

#### ADVERTISEMENT,

Several single Sermons on several Occasions,  
by Dr. IBBOT, printed in his Life-time,  
are to be had of *John Wyat*.

*F I N I S.*





*BOOKS printed for and sold by* THOMAS  
ASTLEY, *at the Dolphin and Crown in*  
St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1726.



THE Sacred Interpreter: Or, a Practical Introduction towards a Beneficial Reading and a thorough Understanding of the Holy Bible: Containing, I. A faithful History of the four Ancient Monarchies, (the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman,) absolutely necessary for the Knowledge of the Condition of the Jewish People. II. A General View of the State of the Jewish Church, to the Destruction of Jerusalem. III. Remarks on the Pentateuch, and the Prophets in the OLD TESTAMENT, and on the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles in the New; shewing the Design and chief Scope of each Book. IV. An exact Chronology of the Holy Scriptures, taken from Archbishop Usher and Mr. Archdeacon Echard. V. A Dissertation upon Revealed Religion, and an Account of those Divines who have defended it. VI. Difficult Texts of Scripture explained, with a Recital of such Sacred Mysteries as ought not to be made the Subject of human Enquiry. Likewise the several Parts of the Holy Land are compared with the Accounts given thereof by modern Travellers: The whole designed to render the Study of the Holy Scriptures more easy and instructive. By David Collyer, late Vicar of Great Coxwell, Berks. In Two Volumes.

A

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The Truth and Excellence of the Christian Religion asserted : Against Jews, Infidels and Hereticks. In Sixteen Sermons, preached at the Lecture founded by the Honourable Robert Boyle Esq; for the Years 1701, 1702. Wherein is shewn, 1. That the Evidence for This Religion is the most unexceptionable : 2. That it establishes and perfects the Law : 3. Makes the clearest Discoveries of a Future State : And, 4. Accomplishes the Prophecies of the Old Testament. 5. That the Belief of its Doctrines is reasonable : 6. The Obedience required to its Precepts practicable : 7. The Wisdom of the Gospel above any other Religious Institution : And, 8. It's Divine Authority prov'd from the successful Propagation of it. By George Stanhope, D. D. Chaplain in Ordinary to Her Majesty.

An Enquiry into the Nature and Place of Hell: Shewing, I. The Reasonableness of a future State. II. The Punishments of the next Life. III. The several Opinions concerning the Place of Hell. IV. That the Fire of Hell is not metaphorical, but real. V. The Improbability of that Fire's being in or about the Centre of the Earth. VI. The Probability of the Sun's being the Local Hell, with Reasons for this Conjecture, and the Objections from Atheism, Philosophy, and the Holy Scriptures, answer'd. By Tobias Swinden, M. A. late Rector of Cuxton in Kent. The Second Edition With a Supplement; wherein the Notions of Archbishop Tillotson, Dr. Lupton, and others, as to the Eternity of Hell-Torments, are impartially represented; and the Reverend Mr. Wall's Sentiments of this learned Work.

The Sick Man visited, and furnished with Instructions, Meditations, and Prayers, suitable to his Condition, for putting him in Mind of his Change, for supporting him under his Distemper, and for preparing him for, and carrying him through his last Conflict with Death. By N. Spinckes, a Presbyter of the Church of England. The Third Edition. 8vo.

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Dr. Burnet's Sacred Theory of the Earth: Containing an Account of the Original of the Earth, and of all the general Changes which it hath already undergone, or is to undergo, till the Consummation of all Things. In two Volumes. *8vo.* The two first Books, concerning the Deluge, and concerning Paradise. The two last Books, concerning the Burning of the World, and concerning the new Heavens, and the new Earth; with a Review of the Theory, and of its Proofs, especially in Reference to Scripture. The Sixth Edition. To which is added, the Author's Defence of the Work, from the Exceptions of Mr. Warren, and the Examination of Mr. Keil; and an Ode to the Author, by Mr. Addison.

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